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NATIONAL MOVEMENT – THE MASS PHASE-I

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BLOCK 3 NATIONAL MOVEMENT – THE MASS PHASE-I

Introduction

In this Block, we will discuss the passage of the national movement into more mass-based politics. After the decline of the Swadeshi movement, the nationalist politics entered a relatively quiet phase. The nationalist ranks were divided between the ‘Moderates’ and the ‘Extremists’. The Government’s policy was to unleash repression against ‘Extremist’ movement while offering concessions to the Moderates through the Morley-Minto Reforms of 1909. These Reforms also drove a wedge between the Hindus and the Muslims by the provision of separate electorates to the Muslims. The ‘Extremists’ were also lying low after the imprisonment and deportation of Bal Gangadhar Tilak and the withdrawal of some active Bengal leaders from politics. However, political dissatisfaction with the Morley-Minto Reforms grew over time. The period of the First World War proved to be a period of growing mass discontent, particularly caused by the hardships generated during this period. People were becoming restive. The two Home Rule Leagues, headed by Annie Besant and Tilak, were trying to organise people for the demand of home rule for India. There were also unity moves between the Congress and the Muslim League which pushed the nationalist politics at a higher level. We will discuss these issues in **Unit 9**.

It is generally agreed that the Gandhian method of popular mobilisation transformed the nature of nationalist politics in India. Gandhi adopted and applied these methods initially in his struggle against racist discrimination in South Africa. In India, the peasant protests in Champaran and Kheda, and the workers’ protests in Ahmedabad provided Gandhi the ground to organise the protests according to his own tenet of Satyagraha. You will learn about these developments in **Unit 10**. The post-War years witnessed particularly hectic political activities. The Rowlatt Satyagraha, started by Gandhi against the draconian Act which gave the Government arbitrary powers, spread to various parts of the country. Unprecedented mass protests were witnessed in Mumbai, Delhi, Ahmedabad, Amritsar and many other places. The Government responded with massive repression, the climax of which was seen in the Jallianwala Bagh where hundreds of unarmed people—men, women and children—were killed in cold blood. This was a great shock to the psyche of the country and turned the people decisively against colonialism. This was the ‘turning point’ which **Unit 11** will discuss. Rowlatt Satyagraha was soon followed by the Khilafat and Non-cooperation movements which witnessed unprecedented public display of Hindu-Muslim solidarity. The Non-cooperation movement effectively utilised the grievances of peasants and urban people to mobilise them into anti-colonial protests. Most of India was galvanised with nationalist fervour and the Congress was re-energised and became truly mass-based. **Unit 12** deals with this phase of the nationalist mobilisation.

Unit 13 looks into revolutionary nationalist organisations and individuals whose memories are still imprinted on the minds of the people. A number of dedicated, selfless and strongly nationalist persons, such as Ramprasad Bismil, Chadrashekhhar Azad, Surya Sen, Jatin Das, Bhagat Singh, Rajguru and Sukhdev,

grew impatient with the mainstream nationalist politics. They sought a different route to achieve complete independence of India from colonial rule. Initially deriving from anti-colonial militant Hindu ideology, this trend slowly adopted socialist thinking which moved beyond religion, and declared its goal to be freedom from colonial rule and egalitarianism. These ideas were most clearly reflected in Bhagat Singh.

Finally, **Unit 14** discusses the constitutional activities of the nationalist leaders, particularly with regard to the Swaraj Party. This trend of nationalist politics, although veering away from the mainstream Gandhian politics, contributed significantly in exposing the sham which the colonial constitutional reforms introduced in India.



UNIT 9 NATIONALIST POLITICS

DURING THE WAR PERIOD*

Structure

- 9.1 Introduction
- 9.2 Impact of the War on India
- 9.3 Home Rule Movement
- 9.4 Lucknow Pact
- 9.5 Summary
- 9.6 Exercises

9.1 INTRODUCTION

The First World War broke out in 1914 and it continued till 1918. India being part of the British Empire automatically got involved in the war without any consent of its citizens. The war had its impact not only on socio-economic life of Indians but also on their political life. It would be interesting to learn about the major trends in Indian nationalist politics during the period of the First World War. We will first explain in this Unit the impact of the war on India and the response of Indians. Then we will discuss the initiatives taken by nationalist leaders to press for 'Home Rule'. You will also learn how during the course of the war the Muslim League and the divergent groups among the nationalists joined hands to put forward the demands for self-government for India. The signing of the Lucknow Pact in 1916 further strengthened the unity between Hindus and Muslims. Demands for more self-governing rights were raised by nationalists during the war period. This period in nationalist politics paved the ground for a more broad-based movement against the British.

9.2 IMPACT OF THE WAR ON INDIA

When the First World War broke out in 1914, there was a growing demand for self-government in spite of the divisive trends within the leadership of the Congress. Many had reservations about supporting the British in the war which was not in India's interest, but there were also people within India who believed that the cause of Indian independence would be served by helping the British government in its war efforts. The British government deployed huge number of Indian troops on various war fronts and many were killed and seriously injured in the battle. Apart from the loss of life India had to bear huge war debt. The bulk of revenue from India was extracted in the form of land revenue, salt tax and other taxes. During the war taxes were increased and for the first time a super-tax was imposed in 1917. As B.R. Tomlinson has calculated, 'The burden of taxation (excluding land revenue) per head of population rose from just over Rs. 1.5 in 1914-15 to just under Rs. 2.5 in 1918-19. The Government of India incurred over Rs. 105 crores worth of new net permanent debt during the war years, and over Rs. 108 crores' worth of net floating debt. Its annual expenditure on interest

payments which ran at around Rs. 1.8 crores from 1914-17, increased to Rs. 10.9 crores in 1917-18 and to Rs. 12.2 crores in 1918-19’.

The burden of taxation as shown above because of the war affected mostly the common people. It was the rise in prices of food commodities due to taxes and the export of food to feed the army men which greatly aggravated the sufferings of people in India. This was also the period which witnessed crop failures in various parts of India. Not only did the poor peasants and the workers suffered during the war period but many peasant proprietors also lost the ownership of lands to non-cultivating classes who made profit out of speculative business during the war. The big industrial houses gained with the growth of industries during the war, but the working class suffered because of price hike and declining real wages. The consequent outcome was the strike by workers in different parts of India. So when one looks at the immediate consequences of the war on economic life of Indian people generally the picture that emerges is one of discontent and disillusionment. Apart from the economic hardships, forceful recruitment of Indians in the army and their sufferings in the war front agitated the minds of Indians against the British government. However there is also a perception that the upper gentry and the urban middle classes in India supported the British war efforts hoping more concessions from the British in sharing of power in India after the war. In the opinion of historian Hugh Tinker:

‘The outbreak of war in 1914 had witnessed an extraordinary demonstration of loyalty and solidarity from all sections of the peoples of India. It might have been expected that princes and peasants would rally to the Raj in the hour of crisis, but the urban middle classes also competed in efforts to support the British cause, and only a fringe element of revolutionaries tried to exploit the possibility of Britain’s difficulties to overthrow the Imperial power. Yet by the middle years of the war a mood of disillusionment had set in.’

It is not true to observe that there was an ‘extraordinary demonstration of loyalty and solidarity’ from all sections of Indians to the British government in its war efforts but there was a definite thinking among a section of the Indian nationalist leaders that support to the British war effort would help them in achieving self-government. Nationalist leaders failed to realise at that stage that the warring nations were fighting basically to protect their colonial empires not for the interest of the colonised people. What is important to take note is that the war in general created discontent among Indians and provided the Indian nationalist leadership opportunity to reformulate its strategy to fight for self-government. The war period also witnessed the rise in revolutionary movements to overthrow the British government. Another important development was the rise of the Home Rule movement.

9.3 HOME RULE MOVEMENT

The nationalist movement in India faced a major challenge with the split of the Indian National Congress into two distinct groups – ‘Moderates’ and ‘Extremists’ and the formation of the All India Muslim League in the first decade of the twentieth century. Many nationalist leaders saw an opportunity with the outbreak of the First World War to bring the divergent interest groups together to make serious efforts for achieving self-government. The voice of extremism within

the Congress got weakened in the absence of leaders like Aurobindo Ghose, Bipin Chandra Pal and Bal Gangadhar Tilak. When Tilak was released from jail in 1914 he was of the opinion that without the support of the Congress it would be difficult to organise and sustain an effective movement against the British. But moderate leaders like Pherozeshah Mehta were not inclined to allow the extremists back into the Congress. Even then there was a growing feeling within the Congress that the moderate-extremist antagonism was irrelevant in the present context when a united opposition to the British might help in attaining self-government. In this backdrop one needs to look at the developments in Madras under the leadership of Annie Besant and in Maharashtra under the leadership of Tilak to launch the movement demanding Home Rule for India.

Annie Besant was the President of the Theosophical Society which had its headquarters in Madras. She became a theosophist after coming under the influence of Madame Blavatsky of Theosophical Society. She now settled in India. By joining the Congress in 1914 she moved from educational and socio-religious activity to the arena of politics. She had planned to persuade the Congress leaders for re-entry of the extremists in the Congress and to launch an agitation to compel the British government to concede the demand for Home Rule. Meanwhile Tilak after his release from jail in 1914 realised the need of developing a broad based political movement in place of his earlier policy of extremism. Tilak found an opportunity in the line of thinking of Annie Besant to build a base for political activity but at the same time he was careful in keeping an independent political base for himself. Therefore although he supported Besant's decision of forming a Home Rule League he announced his plan to form a separate Home Rule League for the Marathi-speaking parts of India. Annie Besant's Home Rule League was based at Madras and its reach was all India. In 1917 membership of the two leagues reached 60,000.

Through newspapers and pamphlets both in English and vernacular languages the Home Rule Leagues wanted to educate people first for an organised political movement at an all India level to pressurise the British to concede the demand for Home Rule. As editor of the "New India" newspaper Besant was critical of the colonial government and advocated that in place of piecemeal reforms Indians must be united in demanding self-government or Home Rule. Attempts were made to create a strong public opinion for Home Rule. This in a way also paved the ground for mass politics at a later stage in the national movement. It is said that numerically there was much greater participation of people and more visible enthusiasm and emotion compared to the early Congress agitation. Membership in both the organisations gradually increased and their growing strength was felt by the British government. In Bombay the government tried to impose ban on Tilak on the ground that Home Rule demand was seditious and the Madras government debarred Besant from entering Bombay Presidency and the Central Provinces and Berar. In 1917 Besant was interned by the Madras government and both the Congress and the Muslim League strongly protested the arrest of Besant. She was released later on in the same year. The government repression helped the Home Rule movement in gaining popularity. Besant was elected the President of the Indian National Congress at its annual session held at Calcutta in 1917.

The Speech Given by Annie Besant as the Congress President in 1917 [Excerpts]

For the first time in Congress history, you have chosen as your President one who, when your choice was made, was under the heavy ban of Government displeasure, and who lay interned as a person dangerous to public safety. While I was humiliated, you crowned me with honour; while I was slandered, you believed in my integrity and good faith; while I was crushed under the heel of bureaucratic power, you acclaimed me as your leader; while I was silenced and unable to defend myself, you defended me, and won for me release. I was proud to serve in lowliest fashion, but you lifted me up and placed me before the world as your chosen representative. I have no words with which to thank you, no eloquence with which to repay my debt. My deeds must speak for me, for words are too poor. I turn your gift into service to the Motherland; I consecrate my life anew to her in worship by action. All that I have and am, I lay on the Altar of the Mother, and together we shall cry, more by service than by words: VANDE MATARAM.

Why India Demands Home Rule

India demands Home Rule for two reasons, one essential and vital, the other less important but necessary: Firstly, because Freedom is the birthright of every Nation; secondly, because her most important interests are now made subservient to the interests of the British Empire without her consent, and her resources are not utilised for her greatest needs. It is enough only to mention the money spent on her Army, not for local defence but for Imperial purposes, as compared with that spent on primary education.

Source: Annie Besant, *The Case For India*, at www.fullbooks.com

The Speech by Tilak at Nasik in 1917, at the first anniversary of the forming of the Home Rule League

I am young in spirit though old in body. I do not wish to lose this privilege of youth. Whatever I am going to speak today is eternally young. The body might grow old, decrepit and it might perish, but the soul is immortal. Similarly, if there might be an apparent lull in our home rule activities, the freedom of the spirit behind it is eternal and indestructible, and it will secure liberty for us. Freedom is my birthright. So long as it is awake within me, I am not old. No weapon can cut this spirit, no fire can burn it, no water can wet it, no wind can dry it. We ask for home rule and we must get it. The science which ends in home rule is the science of politics and not the one which ends in slavery. The science of politics is the 'veda' of the country. You have a soul and I only want to awaken it. I want to tear off the blind that has been let down by ignorant, conniving and selfish people. The science of politics consists of two parts. The first is divine and the second is demonic. The slavery of a nation constitutes the latter. There cannot be a moral justification for the demonic part of the science of politics. A nation which might justify this, is guilty of sin in the sight of God. Some people do and some do not have the courage to declare what is harmful for them. Political and religious teaching consists in giving the knowledge of this principle.

Contd...

Religious and political teachings are not separate, though they appear to be so on account of foreign rule. All philosophies are included in the science of politics.

Who does not know the meaning of home rule? Who does not want it? Would you like it if I enter your house and take possession of your kitchen? I must have the right to manage the affairs in my own house. We are told we are not fit for home rule. A century has passed and the British Rule has not made us fit for home rule; now we will make our own efforts and make ourselves fit for it. To offer irrelevant excuses, to hold out any temptations and to make other offers will be putting a stigma on English policy. England is trying to protect the small state of Belgium with India's help; how can it then say that we should not have home rule? Those who find fault with us are avaricious people. But there are people who find fault even with the all-merciful God. We must work hard to save the soul of our nation without caring for anything. The good of our country consists in guarding this birthright. The Congress has passed this home rule resolution. In practical politics some futile objections are raised to oppose our desire for *swaraj*. Illiteracy of the bulk of our people is one of such objections; but to my mind it ought not to be allowed to stand in our way. It would be sufficient for us even if the illiterate in our country have only a vague conception of *swaraj*, just as it all goes well with them if they simply have a hazy idea about God. Those who can efficiently manage their own affairs may be illiterate; but they are not idiots. They are as intelligent as any other educated man and if they could understand their immediate concerns they would not find any difficulty in grasping the principle of *swaraj*. If illiteracy is not a disqualification in civil law there is no reason why it should not be so in nature's law also. Even the illiterate are our brethren; they have the same rights and are actuated by the same aspirations. It is, therefore, our bounden duty to awaken the masses. Circumstances have changed, and are favourable. The voice has gone forth 'Now or Never'. Rectitude and constitutional agitation is alone what is expected of you. Turn not back, and confidently leave the ultimate issue to the benevolence of the Almighty.

Source: Ravindra Kumar (ed.), *Selected Documents of Lokmanya Bal Gangadhar Tilak*, Vol.3.

Although the Home Rule movement had support mainly among the middle classes yet it succeeded in reaching those areas where national politics till then could not reach. Both Tilak and Besant were of the opinion that broadening the base of nationalist support was essential along with unity among various groups of nationalists, otherwise the British would play one faction against other and refuse reforms. In the government perception the Home Rule movement was an attempt for the first time of a united, organised, and militant all India opposition to the British rule. The Home Rule agitation was definitely a departure from the earlier politics of the Congress although it might not have carried the characteristics of militant nationalism. It was alleged that the Home Rule agitation tried to excite racial feeling and encourage animosity against the British government. Analysing the government policy towards the movement launched by Annie Besant, historian Peter Robb has shown that government opinion was divided between repression and concession to tackle the movement under Besant and Tilak. While the Home Rule movement was considered as seditious by a section within the local

government, at the same time some within the government were also worried of the popular support because of repressive measures adopted by the government. After careful consideration of the situation the Secretary of State, Edwin Montagu, announced to move further towards self-government and the proposed scheme of Montagu-Chelmsford Reforms was published in 1918. This action on the part of the government created division within the Congress regarding response towards the reforms. Besant argued at a special session of the Congress in September 1918 that the proposal of reforms should be amended making provision for complete provincial autonomy in five years. But both Besant and Tilak failed to make much inroads in the Congress politics and the national politics took a new turn after 1918. Commenting on the achievement and legacy of the Home Rule Movement it has been said that 'it created a generation of ardent nationalists who formed the backbone of the national movement in the coming years when, under the leadership of the Mahatma, it entered its truly mass phase. The Home Rule Leagues also created organisational links between town and country which were to prove invaluable in later years. And further, by popularising the idea of Home Rule or self-government, and making it a commonplace thing, it generated a widespread pro-nationalist atmosphere in the country'. (Bipan Chandra and others, (eds.), *India's Struggle for Independence*). Sumit Sarkar has also observed that the real importance of the Home Rule agitation was its extension to new areas, groups and a new generation.

9.4 LUCKNOW PACT

The first decade of the twentieth century was marked by the Swadeshi and boycott movement following the partition of Bengal, split of the Congress into two clear ideological groups, formation of the Muslim League and growth of radicalism as a means to achieve freedom. Popular discontent was growing against the British but at the same time there was lack of unity and organised united effort to challenge the British rule. The outbreak of the First World War compelled the British government to seek cooperation of Indian people for the British war efforts and politically conscious Indians found it an opportunity to press for demand for self-government. The overriding concern among various groups of Indian nationalists in the course of the First World War was to make unity of effort in opposition to the British rule. In this context the Lucknow Pact is considered as a major move towards solidarity between Hindus and Muslims.

The foundation of All India Muslim League in 1906 primarily to protect the interests of the Muslims by showing allegiance to the Muslims brought in open the difference between the Congress and the followers of the Muslim League. The British government on its part, by providing separate electorates to Muslims through the Reforms Act of 1909, further encouraged the divisive sentiment of the advocates of Muslim separatism. Leadership of the Muslim League was in the hands of the landed aristocracy. However situation began to change in the second decade of the twentieth century with certain developments in India as well as outside India. The repartition of Bengal in 1911 and the involvement of Britain in war against the Ottoman Empire in 1914 gave the feeling to many Muslims that they can no longer rely on the British government. In the war between Italy and Turkey in 1911 neutrality of Britain and the massacre of Muslims in Persia by Russia created a feeling among Muslims that Islam was in danger and the European powers were in league to dismember Turkey. Muslim

press in India helped in publicising this 'Islam in danger' fear and many Muslims resolved to sacrifice their lives to defend Islam if required. This development helped in creating a situation where nationalist oriented Muslims within the Muslim League worked towards rapprochement between the Congress and the League. A young group comprising of lawyers, journalists and others coming from small zamindari background felt the need to join hands with the Congress in the movement against the colonial rule. In Lucknow this group was known as the 'young party' and Wazir Hasan who represented the young Muslims succeeded in getting control over the Muslim League. He tried to bring the aims of the League closer in line with those of the Congress. The draft reforms scheme of the Muslim League prepared under the leadership of the younger group of Muslims had lot of similarities with the Congress except the demand for separate representation. The Congress also resolved, in spite of differences within, to move towards rapprochement with the League. The Congress agreed to respect the separate Muslim interest and to accept the separate electorates for Muslims. Both the Congress and the League were in an accommodating mood to have a workable political consensus. Members of both the Congress and the League met in Bombay in 1915 and the idea of a national government was supported. This was followed by a meeting of both the organisations at Lucknow in 1916 and in this meeting both agreed to a common joint demands and the agreement reached between them is known as the Lucknow Pact. Demand for self-government was declared as the immediate goal and the Congress agreed to accept the demand for separate electorates for Muslims. According to the Lucknow Pact Muslims were conceded separate electorates in seven states in which they were in a minority and got half of the elected seats in the Punjab and one third of the elected seats in the central legislature.

There were however critics among Muslims as well as Hindus opposing the Congress-League alliance. The Muslim landed classes and their allies whose interests were protected by the British were apprehensive of the growing nationalist feelings among Muslims and considered the alliance between the Congress and the League as threat to their existence. Urdu newspapers like the *Al-Bashir*, the *Aligarh Institute Gazette*, *Al-Mizan*, etc. started a vilification campaign. In a rebuttal to such campaign Jinnah wrote in an editorial in the *Times of India*,

'Surely the Mahomedans who have shown the greatest self-restraint and control throughout these grave and momentous crises may be trusted to formulate their demands along with their Hindu leaders. Can there be a better opportunity than this that the Congress and the League should meet in one place and confer together as to the future of India?'

On the other hand, the Hindu Sabhas which came up in certain provinces denounced the seat sharing arrangement proposed by the Congress-League scheme. Particularly in UP where Muslims were allowed 30 per cent of seats in the council although numerically they constituted only 14 per cent of the population in the province there were angry protests. Despite the opposition, the Lucknow Pact ushered in cooperation between the Congress and the League and provided a stronger platform to launch united campaign against the British. Leaders belonging to different religious faith started visiting temples and mosques showing the virtues of communal harmony. J.C. Smith, the Collector and magistrate of Azamgarh in UP which witnessed communal rioting earlier, wrote

in 1917, 'The district of Azamgarh is to be congratulated on the fact that the Dasehra and Muharram ceremonies passed off without disturbances of any kind. For more three years past the government have been anxious regarding this matter and it is highly creditable to the people that at so critical a period there has been no sign of hostility between the different communities.'

The Congress-League alliance inspired younger Muslims to join the Congress-led nationalist movement and many of them were in the forefront of the nationalist agitations. What is important to note that during the period of the First World War national movement in India succeeded in bringing the divergent opinions and groups within India to put a united challenge to the British government. The Home Rule movement which gave momentum to national movement got further strength with the unity between the Congress and the League after the Lucknow Pact. In this context responding to the criticism leveling against the Congress for acceding to the demands of the League Tilak said,

'It has been said, gentlemen, by some that we Hindus have yielded too much to our Mohammedan brethren. I am sure I represent the sense of the Hindu community all over India when I say that we could not have yielded too much....When we have to fight against a third party, it is a very important thing that we stand on this platform united, united in race, united in religion, as regard all different shades of political creed'.

The historians have various opinions regarding the impact of the Lucknow Pact. Hugh F. Owen in an article has made the following observation:

'...The Pact did provide a basis for this new cooperation by removing one very important area of public dissension between Congressmen, Hindus and others, and the Muslim League. Members of both organisations – those who believed in a secular state, Hindus in the United Provinces and the other Hindu-majority provinces, and Muslims in the United Provinces, Bengal and the Panjab – had agreed to make sacrifices in varying degrees, for the sake of cooperation for nationalist goals, and so had helped to create an atmosphere of mutual trust in which Hindus and Muslims could combine in the Rowlatt and the Khilafat agitations...The Pact constituted a statesmanlike attempt by most of the leading Indian politicians of the day to grapple with a problem involving the fears of a large number of Muslims, as well as various Indians' views of the very nature of the India they wished to build. It was an attempt marked by willingness on the part of the participants to compromise and even to sacrifice their interests or principles in the short run for the sake of working in a united fashion for the larger goal of self-government.' (Hugh F. Owen, *Negotiating the Lucknow Pact*, *The Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. 31, No. 3, May, 1972).

Mushirul Hasan agrees that the Pact marked the beginning of co-operation on major political and constitutional issues between the Congress and the League. However he makes the point that:

'By negotiating the Lucknow Pact on the questionable terms of communal representation, the Congress legitimised what were later derided as "separatist" and "communal" demands. By allowing itself to be dictated by narrow regional and sectarian causes, the Congress created a space within which such concerns had to be accommodated even at the risk of destroying the democratic and secular

structures it was striving to build. Instead of curbing divisive tendencies through a concerted ideological campaign, the Congress settled for hastily concluded agreements for immediate political benefits.’ (Mushirul Hasan, *Nationalism and Communal Politics in India, 1885-1930*).

In the assessment of Francis Robinson after the Lucknow Pact the Muslim League was overshadowed by the All India Khilafat organisation and Hindus began to play a much bigger part in Muslim affairs and Muslims began to play a greater part in the affairs of the Congress.

One may agree or disagree with these observations, but keeping in view the polarisation in Indian politics following the foundation of the Muslim League the Congress move in joining hands with the League definitely strengthened the anti-British political movement. If the central focus of the national movement was to strive for self-government then strategically negotiation with the Muslim League even accepting its demand for separate electorate helped in promoting the desired unity between the Hindus and the Muslims. The Pact aimed at removing the fears about majority domination from the minds of Muslims. At the same time it is felt that submission to the League’s separatist agenda was a move without thinking of its future consequences. The pressure of united stand taken by the Congress and the Muslim League was felt by the British and to tame the rising wave of nationalist challenge the British government announced a fresh round of reform measures promising gradual development of self-governing institutions.

9.5 SUMMARY

In this Unit we began our discussion with the impact of the First World War on India. Being part of the British Empire India’s manpower as well as material resources were used by the British in the war efforts. Economic hardship that majority of Indians had to face because of the war created discontent among common people and the leadership of the national movement found an opportunity to press for self-government in exchange of India’s support in the hour of British need. B. G. Tilak and Annie Besant through their respective organisational and support base decided to launch Home Rule Leagues in support of the demand for self-government. The Home Rule movement succeeded in broadening the mass base of the Congress movement. This was also the time when the Congress and the Muslim League felt the need to join hands on certain common demands for a united opposition to the British rule. All these developments in national politics during the war period definitely prepared the ground for a more broad based movement and also succeeded in getting some new concessions in the form of the Reforms Act of 1919.

9.6 EXERCISES

- 1) Discuss the impact of the First World War on India.
- 2) Write a note on the Home Rule Leagues.
- 3) What was the Lucknow Pact? Discuss its significance.

UNIT 10 EMERGENCE OF GANDHI*

Structure

- 10.1 Introduction
- 10.2 Gandhi and His Political Experiment in South Africa
- 10.3 Gandhi's Political Philosophy
- 10.4 Champaran Satyagraha
- 10.5 Kheda Satyagraha
- 10.6 Ahmedabad Satyagraha
- 10.7 Significance
- 10.8 Summary
- 10.9 Exercises

10.1 INTRODUCTION

Emergence of Mahatma Gandhi in Indian politics marked the beginning of a new phase in the Indian national movement and this phase is described as the era of mass mobilisation. Before Gandhi's entry into Indian politics in 1915, and from 1893 to 1914, he was in South Africa where the racial arrogance shown by the colonial rulers and the exploitation of the local people made Gandhi to think seriously of taking up the battle against colonialism. In the course of his struggle in South Africa he developed his political philosophy based on non-violence and Satyagraha to give new direction to mass movement. His knowledge of India's rich cultural tradition and religious ideas and his reading of western thinkers like Leo Tolstoy, John Ruskin, Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau largely shaped his political ideas. Moving ahead from the early nationalist leaders Gandhi gave new meaning to nationalist politics through mass mobilisation. In this Unit, we will explain to you Gandhi's struggle in South Africa and the development of his political ideology. Then we will discuss Gandhi's intervention in the movements of peasants and workers at Champaran, Kheda and Ahmedabad. These three movements brought Gandhi closer to Indian national politics.

10.2 GANDHI AND HIS POLITICAL EXPERIMENT IN SOUTH AFRICA

'Truly speaking, it was after I went to South Africa that I became what I am now.' These words of Gandhi are of immense importance to understand his political philosophy and contribution to the Indian national movement. Gandhi was in South Africa from 1893 to 1914 and in between for brief interludes he came to India. In the course of his stay in South Africa he provided effective leadership to local Indians to fight against racial discrimination. It was in South Africa that he developed his philosophy of passive resistance and civil disobedience which was popularised later on as Satyagraha as an effective means of political mobilisation. After completing his degree in law from England, Gandhi reached Durban in 1893 as a young attorney to work for an Indian firm as a legal

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adviser to Indians living and working in South Africa. On his way to South Africa his painful personal experience of racial arrogance by the whites familiarised him with humiliations and sufferings that Indians were facing in South Africa.

Indians in South Africa at that time were primarily engaged in trading and many lacked not only education but also political sophistication. Gandhi tried to activate their political consciousness and to mobilise them for their rights and justice. Gandhi was instrumental in establishing the Natal Indian Congress in 1894. For creating public opinion in support of their grievances, he started a newspaper—the *Indian Opinion*. Through regular comments in the *Indian Opinion* and by drafting petitions to the Governments of Natal, India, and Britain Gandhi tried to create pressure on the local government against any form of discrimination. He represented the Indian merchants who questioned the applicability of Transvaal Law No. 3 of 1885 which restricted where they could trade and reside, and gave a petition to the Colonial Secretary signed by over 1,000 Indians. While visiting India in 1896 Gandhi was called back to South Africa to deal with a fresh problem of discriminatory legislation by the Natal Parliament which aimed at disfranchising Indians. When Gandhi returned to Durban in 1896 after a short visit to India, he decided to make a new experiment by moving away from urban comfort and settled at a communal settlement at Phoenix, north of Durban. In South Africa, Gandhi's reading of the writings of Leo Tolstoy, John Ruskin and Henry David Thoreau shaped his ideas on non-violent and civil disobedience movement. In 1906, the Transvaal government promulgated a new Act compelling registration of the colony's Indian population. Gandhi presiding over a mass protest meeting held in Johannesburg in that year adopted his new methodology of protest, Satyagraha, for the first time. He appealed to the gathered protesters to defy the new law and suffer the punishments for doing so, rather than going for any violent protest. The struggle continued for years and thousands of Indians, including Gandhi, were jailed. But still people refused to register. The public outcry finally forced South African General Jan Christiaan Smuts to negotiate a compromise with Gandhi and the government conceded to some of the demands. Gandhi's ideas of mass mobilisation, peaceful protest and the concept of Satyagraha matured during his struggle in South Africa and gave him the required confidence to provide leadership to the Indian national struggle. In the following section we will explain to you the political ideas of Gandhi and how he succeeded in integrating diverse sources in developing his political philosophy.

10.3 GANDHI'S POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY

'Hind Swaraj', written by Gandhi in Gujarati in 1909, was proscribed by the Government of Bombay and then in 1910 it was published in an English translation in Johannesburg. The text written in the form of a dialogue gives a fair idea of Gandhi's political thought. Gandhi introduced the book in the following words: 'In my opinion it is a book which can be put into the hands of a child. It teaches the gospel of love in place of that of hate. It replaces violence with self-sacrifice. It pits soul force against brute force'.

In this book Gandhi held modern civilisation responsible for the growing urge for luxury and consumption resulting in inequality and poverty in society. Other issues addressed in 'Hind Swaraj' are the meaning of Swaraj, non-violent means

of achieving it, Satyagraha, importance of spirituality, etc. Passive resistance, which was used by Gandhi later on as the major weapon of his political movement, was explained by him in this text in the following words:

‘Passive resistance is a method of securing rights by personal suffering; it is the reverse of resistance by arms. When I refuse to do a thing that is repugnant to my conscience, I use soul-force. For instance, the Government of the day has passed a law which is applicable to me. I do not like it. If by using violence, I force the Government to repeal the law, I am employing what may be termed body force. If I do not obey the law and accept the penalty for its breach, I use soul-force. It involves sacrifice of self’.

Elaborating on non-violence Gandhi wrote: ‘Non-violence in its dynamic condition means conscious suffering. It does not mean meek submission to the will of the evil-doer, but it means the pitting of one’s whole soul against the will of the tyrant. Working under the law of our being, it is possible for a single individual to defy the whole might of an unjust empire to save his honour, his religion, his soul.’

Political ideas of Gandhi which one gets to know after reading this text were influenced both by Indian cultural tradition in which he was born and brought up and his readings of Western thinkers. He successfully integrated all diverse views in his philosophy to fight for India’s freedom and to make India self-reliant. A. L. Basham in an essay, ‘Traditional Influences on the Thought of Mahatma Gandhi’ has observed that the Western ideas mainly sharpened Gandhi’s concepts which he derived from Indian tradition. Explaining the three dominant concepts of Gandhian ideology, ‘Truth’, ‘Ahimsa’ and ‘Satyagraha’, Basham argues that classical Hinduism, Jainism, Buddhism, Bhakti movement stimulated Gandhi to make truth, ahimsa and Satyagraha as cardinal principles of his ideology. Basham concludes, ‘several of Gandhi’s concepts are fully in keeping with Indian tradition, and were probably developed from ideas which he absorbed in his childhood and youth, fertilized and brought to fruition by his contact with the West’. In his opinion compared to early Indian reformers greatness of Gandhian ideology lies in his skill of ‘harmonizing non-Indian ideas with the Hindu dharma, and giving them a thoroughly Indian character.’

Gandhi himself acknowledged the influences on his ideas of Western thinkers like Leo Tolstoy, John Ruskin. Gandhi read a number of other nineteenth century thinkers of Western civilisation which include Thomas Carlyle, Henry David Thoreau, Ralph Waldo Emerson and Robert Sherard. A list of such works forms appendix of ‘Hind Swaraj’. Tolstoy’s book ‘Kingdom of God is Within You’ and Ruskin’s ‘Unto This Last’ introduced him to the new meanings of society, state and politics. Being influenced by the teachings of Jesus in ‘The Sermon on the Mount’, Leo Tolstoy advocated for the acceptance of love as the core value of human life and rejected all forms and institutions of violence. He considered the State as the embodiment of coercion and force and stressed the value of peaceful resistance. Acknowledging the transformation brought by Tolstoy’s book Gandhi wrote: ‘It was forty years back when I was passing through a severe crisis of skepticism and doubt that I came across his book, ‘The Kingdom of God is Within You’, and was deeply impressed by it. I was at that time a believer in violence. Its reading cured me of my skepticism and made me a firm believer in ahimsa.’ Tolstoy’s view on society and the State had influenced Gandhi in deciding

his course of action in political movements in India. After reading Ruskin's 'Unto This Last' in his long train journey in South Africa in 1904 Gandhi wrote, 'It gripped me. Johannesburg to Durban was a twenty four hours' journey. The train reached there in the evening. I could not get any sleep that night. I determined to change my life in accordance with the ideals of the book.' Ruskin's idea made Gandhi to think about community living and commitment to work by self which motivated him to set up his first Ashram—the Phoenix Settlement—for community living. Gandhi translated this book by Ruskin into Gujarati and titled it 'Sarvodaya'. Gandhi was impressed by the doctrine of social organisation that Ruskin defended in his book and his passion for justice. There was also condemnation of a competitive social order and unjust economic system. Henry David Thoreau's book 'Essay on the Duty of Civil Disobedience' advanced irrefutable arguments against the capacity of organised government for producing evil in man and society. He argued for civil disobedience to resist the wrong laws of the State. Gandhi found in Thoreau and his writings his own belief in the virtue of passive resistance. It may not be possible to determine the exact role of Thoreau in the evolution of the Gandhian technique of Satyagraha because in a letter on September 10, 1935 Gandhi wrote, 'The statement that I had derived my idea of Civil Disobedience from the writings of Thoreau is wrong. The resistance to authority in South Africa was well advanced before I got the essay of Thoreau on Civil Disobedience. But the movement was then known as passive resistance. As it was incomplete I had coined the word Satyagraha.... When I saw the title of Thoreau's great essay, I began to use his phrase to explain our struggle to the English readers. But I found that even "Civil Disobedience" failed to convey the full meaning of the struggle. I therefore adopted the phrase Civil Resistance'.

The point needs to be noted is that the concepts of truth, Ahimsa, Satyagraha which are synonymous with Gandhian political movements in India are rooted in Indian cultural tradition as well as his acquaintance with the intellectual tradition of the West. Gandhi tried to synthesize the diverse ideas keeping in view the necessity of developing a broad based national movement in India. His technique was based upon certain principles which were not used in political movement earlier. Gandhi was well aware of criticism about contradictions in his ideas and his reply was, 'In my search after Truth I have discarded many ideas and learnt many new things.... I have no feeling that I have ceased to grow inwardly ... when anybody finds any inconsistency between any two writings of mine, if he has still faith in my sanity, he would do well to choose the later of the two on the same subject.' To face the challenges of oppression, violence and injustice created by the colonial rule, Gandhi appealed for a movement based on selflessness, courage and moral force to establish a new political order. Gandhian method of civil resistance assumed significant importance in India's struggle against colonialism and Satyagraha became an effective means to voice political as well as social protest. Commenting on Gandhian politics Judith Brown has observed that 'His ideal of service to those in need made it likely that he would only participate in politics when he felt that by so doing he could right 'wrongs' which people were suffering; but he, if any one, had the potential for reaching out to those beyond the political camp, to make the new style of institutional politics burst out of its early limitations, and to create a large political nation. What was more, in Satyagraha he had a technique ideally suited to work among those who were unaccustomed to institutional politics.' The context and complexities in

which Gandhi tried to forge unity among Indians to challenge the colonial rule, his concern for common people and efforts to bring masses in the mainstream national politics marked the beginning of a new phase of national movement. In the following section we will discuss that after coming back to India from South Africa in 1915 how Gandhi engaged himself in the struggle of peasants and workers against exploitation and created a space for himself to give new direction to the Indian national movement.

10.4 CHAMPARAN SATYAGRAHA

Gandhi's success in his movement against racial discrimination in South Africa made him famous in India as a leader who fought for the common people against the colonial rule. After coming back from South Africa, he initially decided to set up a base in Gujarat and to work for the welfare of people. National movement in India at that juncture was divided into two groups, Moderates and Extremists, and there were also people who believed in revolutionary actions to fight for freedom. There were also some people within Muslims who formed the Muslim League to work for the interests of Muslims alone. Given this background Gandhi tried to develop a political base by interacting with cross section of people. Politics of the Moderates or the Extremists could not convince Gandhi for achieving Swaraj nor did he have any conviction in the politics of violence. His belief after his successful political movement in South Africa in the strength of Satyagraha encouraged him to wait for suitable opportunity to launch Satyagraha in India. The movement of peasants at Champaran in Bihar against indigo planters in 1917 provided Gandhi that desired opportunity.

Champaran was in North Bihar having large villages and two major towns—Motihari and Bettiah. Being covered by the permanent settlement of 1793 three proprietors—Bettiah, Ramnagar and Madhuban Estates—controlled most of the lands of the district but the landlords instead of directly managing the lands leased out lands to temporary tenure-holders. The European tenure-holders got hold of a sizeable section of cultivable lands and because of big profit they started cultivating indigo. The European planters cultivated the lands either directly or through peasant tenants but the tenants were the worst victims of the planter raj. In 1917 with the declining demand of indigo in the world market the pressure on the tenants increased and made them the worst victims of the slump in market. An official report of the period states that 'Everything the cultivator had to sell, rice, oil-seeds or gur, had either fallen or at least not risen in price, while everything he had to buy, cloths, salt, kerosene, had become extremely expensive'. Besides the general economic hardship of the tenants, the 'tinkathia' system caused immediate unrest among the cultivators. The name 'tinkathia' came from the arrangement in which three kathas per bigha of a peasant land holding was fixed for cultivation of indigo. Planters also insisted that in best cultivable lands indigo should be cultivated so that the production of crop is more. The price paid to the ryots was fixed based on the area of land not on the volume of crop production. This was the reason for pressurising the cultivators to cultivate indigo in good lands to get maximum crop. The cultivators also faced other forms of economic and social exploitation which made them agitated against the existing planter raj. The situation in Champaran was not much different from other parts of India where cultivators were facing various forms of exploitation. But it was Gandhi's intervention and leadership which made Champaran movement exceptional.

On the invitation of local Congress leader Raj Kumar Shukla, Gandhi came to Champaran in 1917 to have first hand experience of the plight of Champaran peasants. Local administration was aware of Gandhi's concern for the abolition of indentured labour and was not comfortable with Gandhi's presence in Champaran. After meeting the commissioner of the division Gandhi expressed his intention to look into the grievances of indigo cultivators as reported by local people. But the commissioner was of the opinion that Gandhi may provoke disturbances and wrote to the Chief Secretary, Government of Bihar and Orissa, asking permission to intern Gandhi on grounds of public safety under the Defence of India Rules. Gandhi was asked by the district magistrate of Champaran to quit Champaran as his presence might create a problem for public peace. Government action to Gandhi's presence in Champaran evoked protest from the Indian press and the *Amrita Bazar Patrika* wrote, 'So Mr. Gandhi has gained his point. The part which he has played in this sensational matter is no less important than what he did when he started his passive resistance campaign in South Africa. There he braved jail and the displeasure of the authorities in the cause of suffering humanity; here also he did the same.' Gandhi's simplicity and ability to reach common people in their language and his visit to the villages virtually made him the saviour in the eyes of masses. Gandhi demanded an enquiry by the government of the grievances of cultivators and asked the government to stop illegal exactions from cultivators. The Bihar government, under the pressure from the central government and much against its wish, agreed to appoint a commission which included Gandhi to look into the condition of Champaran peasants. The central government explained the rationale for agreeing to Gandhi's demand in a letter to the Bihar government: 'In appointing a Commission, to use your phrase, we are "heading off" Gandhi, but in doing so we avoid giving the appearance of shirking our responsibilities. We feel that it is more expedient to head him off than to lay him by the heels and thus give a handle to the suggestion that we are burking the whole enquiry'. Whatever be the logic behind the government action as a result of the Committee of Enquiry appointed by the government and the recommendations of this Enquiry Committee the Champaran Agrarian Act was made in 1917. The Act abolished the 'tinkathia' system and also partly addressed the grievances of the tenants. Although neither the planters nor the tenants were happy with this arrangement but definitely by his intervention Gandhi succeeded in making the struggle of Champaran peasants the first successful experiment of Satyagraha in Indian political movement.

Analysing Gandhi's style of leadership in Champaran movement Judith Brown has observed that 'Leaving aside the recognised politicians, he went into the villages dressed in the sort of clothes villagers wore, speaking the vernacular, espousing causes which concerned his rustic audience: while doing so he drew in the local business and educated men who had had little interest or influence in the Congress style of politics. He acted as go-between for these different groups, mediating between two tiers of public life, and in return secured a powerful provincial following. He succeeded where earlier politicians had failed or had not even attempted to mobilise support.' In the course of Champaran movement a group of local intelligentsia like Rajendra Prasad, Rajkumar Shukla, J. B. Kripalani, Indulal Yajnik, etc. came in close contact with Gandhi and worked as his emissaries among masses in organising movement. Till Champaran people in India knew Gandhi for his heroic struggle in South Africa and Gandhi

maintained a distance from the Congress-led national movement. Gandhi's participation in the movement of Champaran peasants and whatever success he achieved in compelling the government to redress the grievances of peasants created an image of Gandhi's leadership quality across different groups and different regions. The Champaran Agrarian Act of 1918 which was the immediate outcome of the movement brought some respite for the peasants and put certain restrictions on the planters.

10.5 KHEDA SATYAGRAHA

When Gandhi was engaged in leading the movement of peasants in Champaran, in his home state, Gujarat, peasants of Kheda mobilised themselves demanding revenue relief from the government. Hardship of the peasants was caused by crop failure and rise in prices. When the peasants were in debt trap the government was not ready to relieve them from revenue burden. The condition of peasants narrated by a peasant of Kheda in 1918 was as follows:

'The scourge of plague is upon us. Bajri which was sold at Rs.2 a maund in Sanvat 1916 (this should be A.D. 1916) is now selling at Rs.3 and ¼ a maund. Rice is at Rs.4 to 6 a maund. And under the law we may not keep Mowhra flowers. What shall the poor eat as they are thus placed and wherefrom shall they procure the money they pay you with? The prices of iron having gone up our plough shares and our implements have become very dear. Things that cost two or three rupees before are costing Rs.12 today. Labour also has become very expensive.'

In 1918 Gujarat suffered a lot because of severe plague and in Kheda alone the number of death was 16,740. Although there was a perception that the sympathizers of the Home Rule movement and the members of the Gujarat Sabha were behind the instigation of Kheda peasants but Gandhi made it clear in a public meeting in Bombay in 1918 that outsiders had no role in starting the agitation at Kheda. He said:

'This struggle was not started by outsiders. Nobody instigated the Kheda public to launch it. There is no political motive behind it. It did not originate with the Home Rulers or with any barristers or lawyers as some people allege.... It was started by the tillers themselves. After the political Conference at Godhra, some agriculturists in Kheda decided to request the Government for relief in view of the excessive rains. They wrote to me, informing me that they were legally entitled to relief and asking me whether I could help'.

Let us see how the movement started at Kheda and what Gandhi's intervention was. Mohanlal Kameshwar Pandya and Shankarlal Parikh, two local leaders of Kheda, seeing the discontent of local peasants, made appeal to the Bombay government not to force the peasants to pay revenues. They also sought help from outside leaders, particularly from the members of the Gujarat Sabha in Ahmedabad, in favour of the peasants. They also sent telegram to Gandhi for help who at that time was in Champaran. Gandhi advised them to be firm on their demands but could not personally come. The Gujarat Sabha in which Gandhi was president urged the Bombay government for exemption in some cases and also postponement of revenue demands. But not getting favourable response the Sabha asked the peasants not to pay land revenues. The government on its part

after an enquiry found no justification for suspension of revenues. Local press gave publicity to peasant discontent and their agitation for suspension of revenue demands. Gandhi reached Bombay on February 1918 and decided to make an inquiry personally of the hardship of peasants. Gandhi along with other members of the Gujarat Sabha visited the villages in Kheda and found justification in peasants demand for suspension of revenues. Getting no assurance from the government on the demands of peasants Gandhi decided at a meeting of the Gujarat Sabha to resort to Satyagraha. In a meeting at Nadiad on 22 March 1918 Gandhi urged the volunteers to take a sacred pledge which was as follows:

‘We the undersigned...solemnly declare that we shall not pay the assessment for the year whether it be wholly or in part; we shall leave it to the Government to take any legal steps they choose to enforce recovery of the same and we shall undergo all the sufferings that this may involve. We shall also allow our lands to be confiscated should they do so. But we shall not by voluntary payment allow ourselves to be regarded as liars and thus lose our self-respect’.

Gandhi personally toured villages of Kheda and encouraged Satyagrahis to stand by the pledge. Pandya and other local leaders were arrested for defying the government but they aroused lot of local support. Government was confident that Gandhi would not resort to violence by giving his professed faith in passive resistance. Government was also equally concerned for the needed support of Indians in the British war effort. Therefore the government ordered its local officials to be restrained in collection of revenues and not to confiscate lands. Gandhi decided to call off the Satyagraha without getting much concrete assurance from the government. It is viewed by some that Gandhi was not very happy with the developments in Kheda and there were also reports of violence in some areas disobeying Gandhi’s appeal to passive resistance. Judith Brown has commented that in Gandhi’s assessment ‘this satyagraha gave him no happiness, and lacked the essentials of a complete satyagraha triumph, since it did not leave the satyagrahis “stronger and more spirited” than they were before’. Gandhi’s assessment may not be completely true as one finds that this Satyagraha created ‘a place for him in the ranks of the politicians’. Satyagraha in Kheda failed in achieving its objectives but the effectiveness of Satyagraha was proved. Judith Brown has observed that ‘Kaira (Kheda) hammered home the lesson of Champaran that satyagraha could be used in virtually any situation of conflict, by literate and illiterate. It was a weapon for all seasons, and in Gandhi’s hands, directed by his personal ideology, it gave him the edge over conventional politicians with their techniques of petitions, public speeches and debates, which were more suitable for the educated’. David Hardiman has argued that neither peasants nor the government gained visible victory from Kheda Satyagraha. But ‘the real victory lay with Gandhi who had built for himself a powerful political base in the villages of Kheda district’. In future course of nationalist movement villages of Kheda became the strong support base of the nationalist movement.

10.6 AHMEDABAD SATYAGRAHA

In 1918 Gandhi organised another Satyagraha movement in Ahmedabad in support of mill workers. Ahmedabad was known for its textile industry and the textile mills in Ahmedabad witnessed steady growth in cloth production from 250 million yards in 1913-14 to 392 million yards in 1916-17 although the production declined in 1918-19. Labour was in demand to keep pace with rise in production. But the

outbreak of plague in Ahmedabad in 1917 forced many labours to leave Ahmedabad to save them from plague. The mill owners in order to retain workers paid bonus to them as high as 75% of their pay. But when the threat of plague was over, the mill owners decided to stop the plague bonus from February 1918. This created resentment among workers who were facing hardship because of rise in prices caused by the war. Gandhi was approached by one of the secretaries of the Gujarat Sabha about the discontent among Ahmedabad mill workers. Ambalal Sarabhai who was one of the owners of textile mills in Ahmedabad was known to Gandhi. Gandhi requested to Ambalal for enhancement of wages and decided to help in finding solution to workers problems. Presiding a meeting of workers Gandhi argued for amicable solution of workers grievances. Gandhi represented the workers in a board of arbitration formed by the local government. However many workers, defying the arbitration process, went for strike and the owners on their part declared lockout. Gandhi on his part after a careful study of the situation suggested for a reasonable increase of wages and prepared a pledge to be signed by the Satyagrahis. Through leaflets written during this period Gandhi wanted to educate the Satyagrahis about the principles of Satyagraha. Coming under the pressure of the mill owners when some workers started to join the mills Gandhi announced his decision of fasting to create moral pressure. What prompted the mill owners to settlement has different interpretations but a settlement was made in which 35% increase in wages was agreed. Fasting was conceived as a means of self-suffering to create moral pressure over the opponent and this was Gandhi's first use of fasting as a political weapon in India. Gandhi's intervention in Kheda and Ahmedabad in support of the demands of peasants and workers helped him in creating a political base in rural and urban areas of Gujarat. Judith Brown has observed that 'As Kaira (Kheda) drew Gandhi into the villages and fields of Gujarat, so Ahmedabad drew him into the towns and factories, distinguishing him even more clearly from the older political leaders in the scope of his interests and the character of his following.'

10.7 SIGNIFICANCE

Issues in Champaran, Kheda and Ahmedabad were different. The social and political context was also different. But in all three places Gandhi made use of Satyagraha as the mode of political mobilisation. Political climate in India at that time was definitely conducive for an effective political mobilisation against the British rule due to the Home Rule movement and the Lucknow Pact. But still a broader political mobilisation involving people of different interests was not visible. The movements in Champaran, Kheda and Ahmedabad were organized around local issues but Gandhi's intervention paved the ground for bringing masses into broader political movement. Gandhi's charisma no doubt helped in acceptance of his leadership by the local people for their movement against oppression, but Gandhi also brought with him a new language of protest. Rejecting violence as a form of protest and focusing on passive resistance, and moral force rather than physical force, as his political weapon Gandhi succeeded in giving a new direction to political mobilisation. There are different interpretations of Gandhi's leadership in the movements at Champaran, Kheda and Ahmedabad. Judith Brown has made the following observation:

'He worked in two regions notoriously backward according to the standards of the political leaders, and attracted large followings precisely because he took up issues which were outside their range of interests, and provided his adherents

with a technique of action appropriate to their needs but which the politicians feared to use. Though much has been made of Gandhi's charismatic appeal, it becomes clear that in Gujarat and Bihar his public image was no simple or single one. He appealed to different groups for different reasons and different ways, and the pattern of his leadership was far more complicated than the manipulation of an adulatory audience. In certain areas where he was personally known, his appeal to the lowest groups in society was temporarily charismatic, as he became virtually a local messiah; but for his real work he relied on small groups of influential local men whom he educated to be his "subcontractors" in rallying support and organising his campaigns. Such men followed him for a variety of reasons – personal attraction, religious conviction, the prospect of economic gain or increased local prestige, or for lack of any one else.'

Jacques Pouchepadass in his book 'Champaran and Gandhi' has argued that peasants were more active in mobilisation and actions against the plantations in different villages rather than the elite leadership as shown in most of the narratives of Gandhian movement in Champaran. Gandhi's simplicity, determination and civil disobedience along with various rumours about Gandhi's ability to negotiate with the government officials attracted masses towards Gandhi for redressing their grievances. Local leaders used Gandhi's name to mobilize peasants even without the knowledge of Gandhi. Gandhi appealed to the peasants not to resort to violence and made it clear that solution to their problem would come from the government and not from him. But Gandhi's moderating influence failed to restrain the masses from violence where Gandhi was not present. In the opinion of Jacques Pouchepadass there were numerous violent agitations which were directly influenced by Gandhi's campaign in Champaran but Gandhi had practically no control over such mass actions.

Disagreeing with Judith Brown's assumption that "subcontractors" played important role in mobilising peasants Sumit Sarkar has argued that 'the Gujarat peasants had a mind of their own', and they were not simply responding to Gandhi's men. Referring to Gandhi's intervention in Ahmedabad textile workers' movement, Sarkar is of the opinion that Gandhi's approach of peaceful arbitration of disputes between owners and workers was successful in Ahmedabad because of his personal contacts with Ahmedabad mill owners and workers. But 'this Gandhian model, which rejected not only politicisation along "class-war" line but also militant economic struggles, never spread beyond Ahmedabad.'

A close look at the movements in Champaran, Kheda and Ahmedabad suggests that in each place local people first raised voice against exploitation and also initiated mobilisation. The intervention of Gandhi came later on after getting invitation from the local leadership. Image of Gandhi as a leader was not yet much known but his successful movement in South Africa created an image of him as a leader who can confront enemies and fight for justice. His intervention not only provided direction to the movements already started by the masses but Gandhian non-violence provided an effective and legitimate form of movement which was still unknown. In the course of these three movements Gandhi was able to influence local educated youths like Rajendra Prasad, J. B. Kripalani in Bihar, Vallabhbhai Patel, Indulal Yajnik in Gujarat who later on played significant role in nationalist politics. Gandhi had not yet decided about his future course of association with nationalist politics, but these movements definitely laid the ground for Gandhi's greater role as a national leader.

10.8 SUMMARY

This Unit introduces you to emergence of Gandhi in Indian politics. We began our discussion by referring to Gandhi's role in organising protest and leading the movement in South Africa against racial discrimination. His experiment with non-violence and Satyagraha as political weapon in the course of his movement in South Africa was unheard of in political protest. We have explained how his knowledge of Indian cultural tradition and his readings of Western thinkers shaped his political philosophy. He had the ability to integrate diverse ideas depending upon the context and the need. We have also explained that the movements started by peasants and workers in Bihar and Gujarat on local issues, got Gandhi's support later on, and through the method of Satyagraha he tried to redress the grievances of peasants and workers. Whatever success he achieved for the local masses through the movements at Champaran, Kheda and Ahmedabad, these movements raised lot of hopes in Gandhi's leadership and soon he emerged as the leader of the Indian national movement.

10.9 EXERCISES

- 1) What was the significance of the South African experience in formulation of Gandhi's political philosophy?
- 2) Discuss the differences in the social and political conditions in Champaran, Kheda and Ahmedabad.
- 3) Discuss the various views on the significance of Gandhian movements before the Non-cooperation movement.

UNIT 11 THE TURNING POINT*

Structure

- 11.1 Introduction
- 11.2 Background of the Rowlatt Satyagraha
- 11.3 Organisation of the Satyagraha
- 11.4 Regional Spread of the Satyagraha
- 11.5 Importance of the Satyagraha
- 11.6 Summary
- 11.7 Exercises

11.1 INTRODUCTION

In the previous Unit we have discussed the emergence of Gandhi in Indian politics with reference to his contributions to the peasants' and workers' movements at Champaran in Bihar and Kheda and Ahmedabad in Gujarat. Next important event towards the growth of national movement in India and the leadership role played by Gandhi was the Rowlatt Satyagraha of 1919. The enactment of the Rowlatt Act in 1919 by the British government empowering the state with arbitrary powers to suppress voices against the British government evoked sharp reactions from Indian people. Gandhi's experience in South Africa of fighting against the government by using the technique of Satyagraha encouraged him to give a call for Satyagraha against the Rowlatt Act. We will explain in this unit the background of launching the Rowlatt Satyagraha, and how in different provinces people belonging to different classes, castes and communities responded to Gandhi's call, and the violence that broke out following the movement in some parts of India. Gandhi withdrew the movement because of violence and the movement failed to repeal the Rowlatt Act. Still the Rowlatt Satyagraha through its mass mobilisation marked the beginning of a new phase in Indian national movement and Gandhi took the centre stage of national politics.

11.2 BACKGROUND OF THE ROWLATT SATYAGRAHA

In the previous Unit we have explained to you the Gandhian concept of Satyagraha and how Gandhi used the method of Satyagraha and non-violent protest to redress the local grievances. Gandhi's leadership to the movements of peasants and workers in Bihar and Ahmedabad paved the way for his larger role in Indian national movement. Following the repressive Rowlatt Act passed by the British government in India Gandhi launched his first all India mass Satyagraha in March 1919. In this section we will discuss the developments which culminated in the passing of the objectionable Rowlatt legislation and the consequent nation-wide Satyagraha movement launched under the leadership of Gandhi. In India practically every class had grievances against the British rule and they were hoping that after the end of the First World War the British government would bring

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major administrative reforms to meet the expectations of Indian people. However the reform initiated by the Montagu-Chelmsford Reforms Act of 1919 was of very limited nature and therefore the leadership of the nationalist movement was critical of this reform. This was also the time when India witnessed the outbreak of revolutionary activities particularly in Bengal, Maharashtra and the Punjab to fight for freedom of India through violent means. The British government on its part along with the path of limited reform wanted to suppress any activities by Indians which in their opinion are against the interest of the British government in India. During the course of the First World War the British government took recourse to extraordinary powers to deal with the 'revolutionary' activities. Once the War was over they appointed a committee under the chairmanship of Sidney Rowlatt to suggest legislative measures to curb revolutionary activities in India. On the recommendation of the Rowlatt committee the Government in India prepared two draft bills to enable the government to check anti-state activities and to empower the government with discretionary power to deal with political crime. In spite of the unanimous opposition by Indian members in the Imperial Legislative Council the government pushed through the legislation. It is also believed that through the Rowlatt Act the government in India wanted to assure those in Britain who felt that the reform proposals of Montagu would affect the British interests in India. The Rowlatt Act authorised the government to bring in amendment in the Indian Penal Code to ensure the security of the state and to short-circuit 'the processes of law in dealing with revolutionary crime'. Gandhi was very much opposed to such repressive act and considered this an open challenge by the British government to Indian people. In a letter to V. S. Srinivasa Shastri (the liberal leader) Gandhi wrote, 'If we succumb we are done for. If we may prove our word that the government will see an agitation such that they never witnessed before, we shall have proved our capacity for resistance to autocracy or tyrannical rule....For myself if the Bills were to be proceeded with, I feel that I can no longer render peaceful obedience to the laws of a power that is capable of such a devilish legislation as these two Bills, and I would not hesitate to invite those who think with me to join me in the struggle'. (9 February, 1919, *Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, Vol. XV). Gandhi believed that the Rowlatt legislation was very much against people's democratic right and the constitutional reforms appear to be a mockery. He understood the prevailing social discontents and the political situation in India correctly. Gandhi communicated his decision to the government of India to defy the new law and also signed a pledge along with his disciples to disobey the Rowlatt Act. Then Gandhi addressed an open letter to 'the People of India' urging them to join the Satyagraha launched against the Rowlatt Act. There was already growing Indian political opinion reflected through the Home Rule movement and the efforts made through the Lucknow Pact for united opposition against the British rule. But it was Gandhi who brought new techniques of mass protest through Satyagraha and non-violent method. Gandhi urged upon the followers of politics of prayer and petition that 'the growing generation will not be satisfied with petitions....Satyagraha is the only way'.

11.3 ORGANISATION OF THE SATYAGRAHA

Ravinder Kumar has observed that 'The launching of the Rowlatt Satyagraha was an act of faith rather than an act of calculation, for although Gandhi had a

firm belief in the righteousness of his cause, he had no idea how the people of India would respond to his initiative.’ (‘Introduction’, *Essays on Gandhian Politics*). By 1919 Gandhi had developed contact with prominent Indian leaders, addressed different sections of Indian people in different parts of the country and also provided leadership to peasants and workers movements in Champaran, Kheda and Ahmedabad. But he still did not have control over Indian National Congress or any political organisation to have the support for organising all India movement. Despite this limitation Gandhi’s decision to launch the first countrywide Satyagraha against the British government, in the opinion of Ravinder Kumar, ‘transformed nationalism in India from a movement representing the classes to a movement representing the masses’. This movement also brought Gandhi in the centre of Indian national movement. The two Home Rule Leagues organised by Mrs. Annie Besant and Bal Gangadhar Tilak and the associations of Indian Muslims provided Gandhi with the needed support base. He also organised his own organisation, the Satyagraha Sabha, for carrying out the movement. The end of the First World War created a sense of urgency among young Indians that Britain must fulfill the war time promises but they were not happy with the proposed Montagu-Chelmsford reforms. Whereas Indian Muslims were concerned about the fate of the Khilafat and were critical of Britain, Gandhi from his political experience in South Africa very tactfully tried to use this anti-British sentiment. Members of the Home Rule Leagues held protest meetings against the Rowlatt Bills in different cities in India. Bombay being very active in the Home Rule movement members of Bombay Home Rule movement first approached Gandhi when he was in Bombay in February 1919 on the Rowlatt Bills. It was the Bombay Home Rulers who through posters and leaflets made people aware of the Rowlatt Bills and publicised Gandhi’s pledge against the Bills. Important newspapers like *Young India*, the Bombay bi-weekly, *Navajivan*, the *Gujarati weekly of Ahmedabad*, the *Bombay Chronicle*, the *Independent of Allahabad*, the *Muslim Akhuwat* of Lucknow, the *Waqt* of Amritsar, etc. played important role in mobilizing public opinion against the Bills. Gandhi by forming the Satyagraha Sabha in Bombay took a definite organisational step to carry forward the movement. This was followed by formation of Satyagraha committees in Delhi, Allahabad, Gujarat and other places. The Sabhas were responsible to mobilise participants, to educate people about Satyagraha and non-violence and to explain the Rowlatt Bills. Much of the effectiveness of the Satyagraha campaign depended on Gandhi’s personal visit to different cities and the initiatives of local leaders. Rajendra Prasad, J.B. Kripalani, Vallabhbhai Patel, Rajagopalachari, Jawaharlal Nehru, Hakim Ajmal Khan, Dr. M. A. Ansari, Dr. Saifuddin Kitchlu, Dr. Satyapal, Swami Shraddhananda, Hasan Imam, etc. committed themselves to help in organising the Satyagraha movement. Gandhi in the course of this Satyagraha movement did not take formal support of the Congress organisation which was not yet prepared for mass agitational politics. He undertook tour to many parts of India to establish Satyagraha Sabhas, to mobilise mass support and to create awareness about non-violence. Before going to the next section here I like to introduce you to the speech given by Gandhi at Madras to mobilise popular support for the proposed Satyagraha. This speech clearly states his ideas on the Rowlatt Bills and the proposed Satyagraha.

Speech on Satyagraha Movement

Trichinopoly

March 25, 1919

FRIENDS,

... You know the Rowlatt Bills perhaps as much as I do. I need not explain them. You all want them to be withdrawn. The Indian councillors in the Imperial Council tried their best to have this legislation withdrawn. They failed. The Bills are bad, but this flouting of the unanimous voice of the Indian members is worse and it is for you and for me, whose representatives those councillors are, to right this double wrong. How can it be righted? When the governors of a country do a great wrong to the people whom they govern, history teaches us that they have resorted to violence, sometimes with apparent success, often they have been defeated; but violence can only result in violence, as darkness added to darkness really deepens it. The doctrine of violence is of the earth, earthy, merely material, and can be no guide for a human being who at all believes in the existence of the soul. If, as I am sure you will reject the doctrine of violence, you have to consider other means for seeking redress, and that, as I would translate, would mean *shatham prati satyam*

The Bills have violated the national conscience, and resistance to those commands which are in violation of one's conscience is a sacred privilege and a beauty, and it is not this law or this command of the governor that we resist, but it is our duty, it is open to us to resist all his commands which are not moral commands, and when we respectfully disobey wrongful things of these governors, we serve not only them but the whole nation. I have been asked wherever I have gone what law, what other laws, shall we disobey. The only answer I am able to give you today is that it is open to us to disobey all the laws which do not involve any moral sanction. That being so, it is totally unnecessary for you to know what laws we shall disobey. The aim of a satyagrahi is to invite upon his own devoted head all the suffering that he is capable of undertaking. Those of you, therefore, who disapprove of the Rowlatt legislation and who have faith in the efficacy of satyagraha, I have come to invite in order that you might sign this Pledge, but I will ask you to consider a thousand times before signing the Pledge. It is no discredit to you that you do not sign the Pledge, either because you do not disapprove of the legislation or you have not got the strength and the will, and it is not open to any satyagrahi to resent your refraining from signing the Pledge....

You might have seen from today's papers received here that I have addressed to the Press a letter embodying some suggestions. I will, however, repeat them this evening. My first suggestion is, that on Sunday week, i.e., 6th day of April, we shall all observe a 24 hours' fast. It is a fitting preliminary for satyagrahis before they commence civil disobedience of the laws. For all others, it will be an expression of their deep grief over the wrong committed by the Government. I have regarded this movement as a purely religious movement and fast is an ancient institution amongst us. You will not mistake it for a hunger- strike (Laughter.) nor will you consider it as designed for exerting any pressure upon the Government. It is a measure of self-discipline, it will be an expression of the anguish of the soul, and when

the soul is anguished, nobody could resist. I hope that all adults will take up the task unless they are prevented from doing so by ill-health or religious conviction. I have also suggested that on that Sunday all work should be suspended, all markets and all business places should be closed. Apart from the spiritual value of these two acts, they will form an education of first-class value for the masses. I have ventured to include in my suggestions even public servants, because I think that we have to credit them with conscience as also their independence and ability and privilege to associate themselves with wrongs which the nation may want to resent. It is right that they should not take part in political meetings and political discussions, but their individual conscience must have full and free play. My third suggestion in which public servants may not take part is that on that day, we should visit every hamlet, if we can, and hold meetings and pass resolutions asking the Secretary of State for India to veto this legislation. I would not ask you to resort to these public meetings and resolutions, but for one reason, and the reason is that behind these meetings and resolutions lies the force of satyagraha to enforce the national will. In these three suggestions, whether you are satyagrahis or not, so long as you disapprove of the Rowlatt legislation, all can join and I hope that there will be such a response throughout the length and breadth of India as would convince the Government that we are alive to what is going on in our midst....

The Hindu, 27-3-1919.

(Source: *Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, Vol. XV)

Gandhi was not very sure of the success and consequences of the movement. Still he went ahead and decided to launch the movement with the nation-wide hartal (strike) on 6 April 1919. Gandhi was arrested on 9 April 1919 and there was mass agitation in different parts of India which soon took a violent turn. Although the movement was most effective in cities and larger towns but followers of Gandhi also reached out to smaller towns and rural areas. Even with very little formal organisation and much beyond of his calculation the Rowlatt Satyagraha succeeded in creating passions among masses. We will now discuss the regional spread of this Satyagraha movement.

11.4 REGIONAL SPREAD OF THE SATYAGRAHA

The Rowlatt Satyagraha proved Gandhi's leadership ability to connect with the masses irrespective of caste, class and community linkages. It was not only the skillful use of popular religious symbols by Gandhi but also his understanding of social realities and different class loyalties helped him in uniting them for a common political cause. Ravinder Kumar said that Gandhi 'looked upon the peoples of India as a loose constellation of classes, communities, and religious groups, and because he had no illusions about the nature of political society in the country, he was able to unite it in a way it had never been united before'. The Rowlatt Satyagraha movement is characterised as 'the biggest and most violent anti-British upsurge which India had seen since 1857'. Delhi, Lahore, Amritsar, Gujarat, etc. were the most affected areas in the course of this movement. With the transfer of capital to Delhi in 1912 political awareness also increased. Revolutionary nationalism, Pan-Islamism and the agitation of the Home Rule League kept people of Delhi politically engaged. Initiatives taken by the members of the Home Rule League and the All India Muslim League to arouse public

awareness against the various actions of the British Government along with the local press highlighting common problems created an anti-British sentiment to which various rumors about the Rowlatt Bills added further fuel. Gandhi attended a large public meeting in Delhi on 7 March in which people representing different sections of society were present. Gandhi founded the Satyagraha Sabha in Delhi which succeeded in drawing a large number of students. Analysing the Rowlatt Satyagraha movement in Delhi Donald W. Ferrell (Ferrell's article on Rowlatt Satyagraha in Delhi, See Ravinder Kumar (ed.), *Essays on Gandhian Politics*) has written that the movement in Delhi lasted from 30 March to 18 April and the men who took part in the movement are divided into two categories—primary leaders and secondary leaders. Primary leaders were those who were recognised as political leaders and secondary leaders were those who were not much known but wanted to play an active role by voicing the concern of the underprivileged sections of the city. Swami Shradhanand who belonged to the Arya Samaj was persuaded by Gandhi to join the movement. Shradhanand played crucial role in drawing popular support in Delhi for the movement. Merchant community as well as common people observed hartal on 30 March in Delhi to protest against the Rowlatt legislation. There was spontaneous response from different quarters without much effort by the leaders of the movement. There were riots and police firing on 30 March in Delhi in the course of public gathering which was given wide publicity by the local press. Due to this incident of violence Gandhi advised volunteers in Delhi not to participate in the hartal on 6 April. Despite Gandhi's appeal there was complete hartal on 6 April in Delhi. Shradhanand and other leaders addressed a gathering of about 15,000 to 20,000 and spoke on the importance of Satyagraha. Gandhi was expected to arrive in Delhi on 9 April but he was arrested on his way to Delhi. Following this public meeting was organized in Delhi under the presidentship of Muhammad Abdul Rahman which was attended by about one lakh people. In this meeting Shradhanand introduced a resolution asking for Gandhi's release and appealed people to follow Gandhi's example of non-violence. Despite the news of Gandhi's release and the requests made by the leaders, hartal continued in Delhi till 18 April. Employees of bank and railways gave the strike call on 13 April. There was sign of more aggressiveness among people and the masses from neighbouring areas of Delhi to the violent mood. There was firing at Chandni Chowk on 17 April. The Rowlatt Satyagraha in Delhi proved that it was possible to bring heterogeneous groups in one platform provided there was unity of interests.

Lahore on the eve of the Rowlatt Satyagraha had enough reasons for disillusionment with the British government. The thinking of Islam in danger because of the British attitude towards Turkey after the First World War, the decision of reparation of Bengal, distress caused by inflationary prices, were enough to agitate the mind of people of Lahore. Gandhi's appeal to observe hartal on 6 April in protest to the Rowlatt legislation got positive support from the people of Lahore. The Provincial Congress Committee extended support to the call for Satyagraha and many prominent citizens also came forward to support the movement. The crowd comprising of different social groups gathered in large numbers and was in rebellious mood. Leaders addressed the gathering on the importance of the hartal and a resolution was passed against the Rowlatt Act. There were protests in the streets of Lahore against local government officials who tried to oppose hartal. On behalf of the government, warning was issued to citizens asking to maintain public order but the mood in the city was of defiance.

The leaders of Lahore used the festival of Ram Navmi on 9 April inviting Hindus and Muslims to join hands and a procession of about 20,000 people, Hindus and Muslims, travelled in different parts of the city. In the procession there was a visible mood of protest against the government. Rumours of Gandhi's arrest on the way to Punjab and the deportation of local leaders of Amritsar like Kitchlew and Satyapal caused strong popular resentment resulting in massive protest against the government in the city. The government on its part resorted to police firing which aggravated the crisis further. Lahore witnessed a massive gathering of about 35,000 people consisting of different religious communities and social classes protesting the government action. On the suggestion of a local leader a Popular Committee was formed to act on behalf of the citizens of Lahore. Seeing no other way the local government tried to negotiate with the People's Committee to enforce law and order in the city. But the general mood was so much against the government action that the leaders of the People's Committee failed to get support for the termination of the hartal. Seeing the popular discontent the government imposed martial law in the city and forced to withdraw the movement. Analysing the Rowlatt Satyagraha in Lahore Ravinder Kumar summed up, 'All that was required in April 1919 to launch a popular movement against the British Government was an issue which would provide a channel of expression for the discontents which affected various classes and communities in Lahore. By initiating a Satyagraha against the Rowlatt Act, Gandhi provided such an issue, and he thereby set afoot a movement whose intensity surprised the local administration no less than it surprised the local leaders of Lahore'.

The worst happened in Amritsar. There was general discontent among people in the Punjab, particularly the Sikhs, because of actions of the British government and the activities and trials of the Ghadrists. On 6 April 1919 Amritsar witnessed a hartal in protest against the Rowlatt legislation. However the government action of deporting local leaders, Kitchlew and Satyapal, and the ban on Gandhi's entry to Punjab led to popular discontent. There was a protest march by local people of Amritsar against the government decision of the deportation of the two leaders. The protesters were stopped and fired upon near the railway foot-bridge. The police firing on 10 April in Amritsar was followed by attacks on government institutions by the common people. To bring the situation in control martial law was enforced by General Dyer. The city was quiet for two days and on 13 April which was the day of annual Baisakhi festival peasants from villages around Amritsar came to visit the Golden Temple. On that day a public meeting was organised in the afternoon in Jallianwala Bagh, a place near to the Golden Temple. The crowd was mostly local residents and the village peasants who were not aware that public meeting was banned in the city. General Dyer without giving any warning to the crowd in that enclosed ground opened fire and according to government estimate 379 persons were killed and 1200 were injured. On the following day martial law was clamped on several other towns of Punjab. In protest to the brutality of the British repression Rabindranath Tagore renounced the 'Knighthood' given to him by the British. Apart from Lahore and Amritsar districts of Gujranwala, Gujarat and Lyallpur in Punjab were seriously affected by the Anti-Rowlatt movement. There were attacks on government buildings and institutions to express people's anger against the government. The government on its part took recourse to force to suppress the movement.

Seeing the cruelties perpetuated at Amritsar the Congress decided to hold the next Congress annual session at Amritsar to express its solidarity with the people

of the Punjab. Paying tribute to those who were killed in Amritsar and elsewhere in the Punjab the Congress condemned the most shameful barbarities. Resolution was passed urging the government for immediate removal of General Dyer and immediate recall of the Viceroy, Lord Chelmsford. It was also decided to acquire the site of Jallianwalla Bagh and to build a memorial to perpetuate the memory of those who were killed.

In Ahmedabad public meeting was organised to protest against the Rowlatt legislation. Under the auspices of the Home Rule League and the Satyagraha Sabha preparations were made to observe 6 April as protest day against the Rowlatt Act. Later, following the news of Gandhi's arrest people came out in the street and workers stopped works in the mills. The police resorted to firing to control the crowd and violence spread in the city. Vallabhbhai Patel, Indulal Yajnik and others appealed for peace. Despite the appeal for restraint disturbances continued, government buildings were attacked, houses were looted. To control the crowd city was virtually placed under martial law. In an estimate it is suggested that about 28 were killed and 123 were wounded in the firing. Gandhi on his return to Ahmedabad on 13 April taking permission from the government organised public meeting and urged upon people to go for fast and confess their guilt. Besides Ahmedabad, the disturbances also spread to Viramgam, Kheda and other places. In United Provinces demonstrations were held in most of the large towns, shops remained closed and public transport came to a halt. Most noticeable was the unity between the Hindus and the Muslims in public gatherings. In Bihar also hartal was confined to mostly in large towns. Bombay, Calcutta, Madras also witnessed hartals but there was restraint on violence. The government report on the Rowlatt Satyagraha in the city of Calcutta stated that in many areas of Calcutta shops were completely closed, cars and trams were stopped; leaflets were distributed asking people to agitate for the release of Gandhi. A large crowd of Hindus and Muslims gathered at the Nakhoda Mosque and from there they went to attend a public gathering of about 6,000 people. 'Enquiries are being made into these matters, but so far, the indications seem to be that the disturbances were organized from outside Bengal, and the attempts to rouse the mass of the people against Government have certainly been less successful here than elsewhere.' Although the movement was confined mostly to cities but small towns and villages in some parts of India also witnessed popular agitation. However violence which broke out in course of the Satyagraha movement compelled Gandhi to call off the Satyagraha. Gandhi wrote:

'It is a matter of the deepest humiliation and regret for me. I see that I overcalculated the measure of permeation of Satyagraha amongst the people. I underrated the power of hatred and ill will. My faith in Satyagraha remains undiminished, but I am only a poor creature just as liable to err as any other. I am correcting the error. I have somewhat retracted my steps for the time being. Until I feel convinced that my co-workers can regulate and restrain crowds, and keep them peaceful, I promise to refrain from seeking to enter Delhi or the other parts of the Punjab. My satyagraha, therefore, will, at the present moment, be directed against my own countrymen.' (14 April 1919, CWMG, Vol. XV).

He advised all Satyagrahis to temporarily suspend civil disobedience and asked them to adhere to the fundamental principles of Satyagraha which rejects any form of violence. The momentum that the Satyagraha created among various classes very soon lost its tempo. But anti-British sentiment that it generated did

not go waste completely. The movement might not have succeeded in forcing the government to repeal the Rowlatt Act but in many ways the Rowlatt Satyagraha proved to be a turning point in history of Indian national movement. In the following section we will introduce you to the nature and significance of this movement.

11.5 IMPORTANCE OF THE SATYAGRAHA

Despite limited organisational support and confined mostly in cities and towns the Rowlatt Satyagraha succeeded in creating a storm against the British which took the character of mass movement. Although the movement did not evoke same response from all parts of India but different classes and communities responded to Gandhi's call. Leaders before Gandhi ignored the plural character of Indian society and also did not pay much attention to mobilise common people against the British. Gandhi realised the importance of bringing people cutting across caste, class and community together to raise voice against the colonial rule. Analysing the reason for Gandhi's success in mobilising masses Ravinder Kumar argued that it was not simply 'skillful exploitation of popular religious symbols' as some scholars attributed to Gandhi's success. According to Kumar 'to the extent that Gandhi's charisma rested upon the use of a religious idiom in politics, to a corresponding extent was it the result of a perceptive insight into the social loyalties of the individual and into the manner these loyalties could be invoked for political action....Gandhi...looked upon the peoples of India as a loose constellation of classes, communities, and religious groups, and because he had no illusions about the nature of political society in the country, he was able to unite it in a way it had never been united before'. The way Gandhi tactfully used hurt sentiments of the Muslims on the issue of the treatment towards Turkey by the British helped him in winning the support of the Muslims. In a speech Gandhi said, 'It may be asked why I, a Hindu, bother my head about the Mahomedan question. The answer is that as you are my neighbours and my countrymen, it is my duty to share your sorrows. I cannot talk about Hindu-Muslim unity and fail in giving effect to the idea when the test has arrived'. (9 May 1919, CWMG Vol. XV). From his reading of India's social reality Gandhi realised that only emotive issue was suited for mass political movement in India and that was his reason for raising voice against the repressive Rowlatt legislation. At the same time it needs to be noted that it was difficult to control such diverse masses in a movement which is non-violent. Provocations as well as the government repression may result in violence and this happened in the case of the Rowlatt Satyagraha.

Judith M. Brown has viewed the Rowlatt Satyagraha as Gandhi's 'transition from peripheral to committed participation in politics'. Gandhi emerged as an all India leader of immense potential and his novel approach to politics succeeded in getting mass support. Judith Brown suggested that the success of the Rowlatt Satyagraha 'depended on local conditions and the support of local political leaders....In every place where hartal was well observed and Gandhi's propaganda welcomed it seems that the tinder of unrest had been drying for months and Gandhi's campaign was merely the spark which started the conflagration'. Despite discontent and strain in public life Central Provinces, Madras, Marathi-speaking Bombay and Bengal did not respond much to the call of Satyagraha because the local leaders did not channelise the discontent into the movement. The Rowlatt

Satyagraha failed in repealing the Rowlatt Act, violence broke out although the essence of the movement was non-violence. ‘Nonetheless,’ according to Judith Brown, ‘as Gandhi’s first essay in all-India leadership it was remarkably instructive to those who could read it correctly, since it showed both the strengths and the weaknesses of the Mahatma in politics’.

Seeing the tone of India’s national movement in the years 1920 to 1942 under Gandhi’s leadership it is not difficult to assume that the Rowlatt Satyagraha provided the ideology and the method of political struggle. Gandhi being a firm believer in the ideology of non-violence never hesitated in spite of criticism to call off the movement whenever it turned violent. The movement also helped Gandhi in gaining the centre stage of national politics and the commanding position in the Congress.

11.6 SUMMARY

The Rowlatt Satyagraha is considered as the turning point in the movement against the British Raj. In response to India’s support to the British war effort the British government promised to bring certain reforms but at the same time the British government was not fully confident to assuage the growing discontent among Indians against the British. This prompted them to pass the repressive Rowlatt legislation empowering the British government to curb anti-British agitation. Gandhi from his successful intervention through Satyagraha to redress the grievances of peasants and workers of Champaran, Kheda and Ahmedabad found an opportunity in the Rowlatt legislation to mobilize public opinion at the national level against the British government. He took the organisational support from the Home Rule Leagues, Pan-Islamist groups in India and the Satyagraha Sabha that he formed to organise Satyagraha against the Rowlatt Act. People in various parts of India who were aggrieved for various reasons found in this Satyagraha an opportunity to express their discontent against the British. In spite of Gandhi’s appeal for not to resort to violence in some places because of police firing and instigation violence broke out and innocent people lost their life. This forced Gandhi to call off the movement. The movement failed to compel the British government to repeal the Rowlatt Act. But the kind of mass mobilisation cutting across caste, class and community identities witnessed during the movement was unprecedented. The movement was a lesson for many to mobilise common people against the British and paved the way for Gandhi’s commanding position over the Congress and national politics.

11.7 EXERCISES

- 1) In what sense can the events described in this Unit can be said to form a turning point in Indian nationalist politics?
- 2) Write a note on the events related to the Jallianwala Bagh.
- 3) What was Rowlatt Act? Why was it unpopular among the nationalists?

UNIT 12 KHILAFAT AND NON-COOPERATION MOVEMENTS*

Structure

- 12.1 Introduction
- 12.2 Beginning of the Khilafat Movement
- 12.3 Background to the Non-Cooperation Movement
- 12.4 Convergence of the Two Movements under Gandhi's Leadership
- 12.5 Main Phases
- 12.6 Contribution of the Movements in Anti-Imperialist Struggles
- 12.7 Summary
- 12.8 Exercises

12.1 INTRODUCTION

It is generally recognised that the Khilafat and Non-cooperation movements were important milestones in the history of Indian nationalism. They initiated a new era of mass mobilisation and radically shaped the future of Indian polity. In a way, the Non-cooperation movement emerged out of the anti-Rowlatt movements and the Khilafat. In fact, it was the Khilafat Conference which earlier adopted the non-cooperation programme. However, it could become a full-fledged movement only after the Congress decided to adopt it. Moreover, when Mahatma Gandhi withdrew it and the Congress ratified the withdrawal, the Non-cooperation movement ended, whereas the Khilafat movement continued beyond this. Thus, the Khilafat movement had originated earlier and lasted longer than the Non-cooperation movement. But, although their trajectories were somewhat different, both were anti-imperialist movements and were brought together during 1920-22 under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi. In fact, in the absence of Mahatma Gandhi, it may not be possible to conceive of a successful convergence of these two anti-imperialist streams. In this Unit, we will discuss the causes for the emergence of these movements, the way they proceeded, the role of Gandhi's leadership and their impact on the Indian people and the colonial state.

12.2 BEGINNING OF THE KHILAFAT MOVEMENT

The Khilafat movement in India arose out of the sentiments of the Indian Muslims to protect the institution of the Khalifa in Turkey. The Khalifa in Islamic tradition was considered as the successor to the Prophet Muhammad, the commander of the believers and the custodian and protector of the Muslim holy places. In the nineteenth century, the Ottoman Empire was the only Islamic empire and, therefore, the Sultan of Turkey was held in great esteem by the Indian Muslims as the Khalifa. As Turkey was defeated in the First World War and it was certain that the victorious Allies would impose strict terms on it, the Muslims in India launched the Khilafat movement to pressurize the British government to be lenient and preserve the territorial integrity of the Ottoman Empire and the institution of Khalifa.

* Resource Person – Prof. S.B. Upadhyay

The ideological origins of the Khilafat movement have been explained in two ways. On the one hand, scholars have located it in the pan-Islamic sentiments and movements across the world, and their non-Indian and external character. On the other hand, some historians have emphasised its inward nature and its efforts to use pan-Islamic symbols to build a pan-Indian Muslim identity and to bring it in sync with Indian nationalism. In fact, both these trends were not contradictory.

The Khilafat may be seen as the attempt on the part of the Indian Muslim leadership to bring their pan-Islamic and Indian nationalist sentiments together. It was this synthesis that brought about the major mass mobilisation from 1919 onwards.

This quest for the unity of Indian Muslims found a religious centre in the office of Khalifa and in the person of Turkey's Sultan. Since the late nineteenth century, there was a widespread acknowledgement among the Indian Sunni Muslims of the Turkey's Sultan as the Khalifa who would protect the Muslim holy places. Thus, pan-Islamic sentiments surged among Indian Muslim leaders whenever Turkey was involved in hostilities, for example, during the Russo-Turkish war of 1877-78 and the Greco-Turkish war of 1897. During 1911-13, a series of Balkan wars created fears in the minds of Muslim leaders that the Christian powers were attempting to crush the Ottoman Empire and the Khalifa. During and after the First World War, these sentiments again came to the fore. Turkey was part of the Axis powers along with Germany and Austria which fought against Britain and its allies. After its victory in the War, the British government removed the Khalifa from power in Turkey. There were also talks about imposition of a harsh peace treaty on Turkey which would deprive it of territories and influence. Under these circumstances, a widespread movement among the Indian Muslims developed which demanded that the Khalifa must retain control over the Muslim holy places and that sufficient territories must be left with the Khalifa to enable him to defend the holy places. This movement known as the Khilafat movement quickly spread among the elite as well as among the urban popular classes and the ulama or the Muslim religious scholars. The British government was declared an enemy, Khilafat funds were flooded with money and ornaments, the Khilafat meetings were attended by thousands of people, and thousands from the border areas migrated from the land of enemy (*Dar al-Harb*) to the land of Islam (*Dar al-Islam*).

The movement derived its leadership from two streams, both involved in educational reforms for the Muslims in the wake of colonial rule. One was the Aligarh-based Westernizing intelligentsia which advocated English education and canvassed for employment in government services. The other was ulama who attempted to strengthen the traditional Islamic system of education based on Madrasas and were opposed to English education and Western manners. The presence of these two types of leadership created a variation in the movement. While the Western-educated leadership generally sought moderation, the ulama provided a radical edge to the movement. However, both these streams, at that moment of time, were united in their anti-British stance and in their support for a pan-Islamic cause.

In order to properly organise the movement, the leadership established two all-India bodies – the All-India Khilafat Committee and the Jamiat al-Ulama-e-

Hind. The earlier Muslim political organisation – Muslim League – was completely overshadowed by these two organisations until the mid-1920s. In 1919, the drive to mobilise the Muslim community for Khilafat demands began successfully. However, it was quite clear that the fight against the British could not succeed unless the non-Muslim Indians were also mobilized in a broader anti-imperialist struggle. At that point of time, the Congress as a nationalist organisation and Mahatma Gandhi as the most acceptable leader were the most suitable options. Gandhiji was quite ready to lead the Khilafat movement, but the Congress was not yet prepared for an all-India movement. However, various other circumstances made it possible for the many anti-imperialist organisations to come together on one platform.

12.3 BACKGROUND TO THE NON-COOPERATION MOVEMENT

The Khilafat movement, besides its pan-Islamic character, was also deeply anti-imperialist and nationalist in its impulse. Beside this, there were several other factors which gave rise to intense anti-imperialist feelings among the Indian people in general. The economic and political situation of the country during and after the First World War created dissatisfaction against British rule. The prices of commodities rose sharply during and after the War creating much hardship for the people. Moreover, the peasantry in some areas was also restive due to increasingly high demand of rents and taxes. This was reflected in the agitations by peasants and workers in various parts of country like Champaran, Kheda, Ahmedabad, Bombay, Madras, etc.

The political optimism of the War years also received severe setback when the British government backtracked on its promises to consider nationalist demands in return for Indian support in the War. The Montagu-Chelmsford reforms which resulted in the Government of India Act 1919 disillusioned the nationalists who had expected much more in the direction of self-government. The Indian National Congress, in a special session at Bombay in August 1918, condemned these proposals as ‘disappointing and unsatisfactory’ and demanded effective self-government. As if to add insult to injury the colonial government passed the Rowlatt Act in March 1919 which empowered the government to arrest and imprison any person without trial. The Act was passed even when the Indian members in the Central Legislative Council opposed it. This incensed the Indian people and widespread unrest followed. Under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi countrywide Satyagraha was held. There were huge meetings, demonstrations and strikes which sometimes also resulted in violence.

The massacre by the colonial government of peaceful protestors at Jallianwala Bagh in Punjab proved to be the last straw. On 13 April 1919, a huge but peaceful crowd gathered at Amritsar in the Jallianwala Bagh to protest against the arrest of their leaders who were participating in the anti-Rowlatt agitations. General Dyer ordered his troops to fire on the unarmed people. Hundreds were killed and thousands injured in the firing. Such brutality shocked the entire nation and ripped open the mask of civilisation the British government was wearing. The great poet, Rabindranath Tagore renounced his knighthood in protest and declared that the ‘I, for my part, wish to stand, shorn of all special distinctions, by the side of my countrymen’. Similar sentiments were widespread and it was time for an all-India nationalist movement to emerge.

12.4 CONVERGENCE OF THE TWO MOVEMENTS UNDER GANDHI'S LEADERSHIP

Gandhiji emerged on the national political scene after his constructive intervention in the peasants' and workers' struggles in Champaran, Kheda and Ahmedabad. After the War, he was emerging as almost a consensus candidate for the leadership of the Congress, particularly due to ill health of Bal Gangadhar Tilak. His belief in non-violence and his method of struggle through Satyagraha had also become known to people. The anti-Rowlatt agitation and the Khilafat movement were two widespread mobilisations after the War which were directed against the colonial government, and Gandhi played a major role in both of these. It may be said that it was his leadership that made the convergence of the two anti-imperialist streams – nationalist and the Khilafat – possible during this period.

The Khilafat leaders were very keen right from the beginning to get the support of the Hindus for their cause. In this effort, they found Gandhi as their staunchest ally. He further tried to join the nationalist demand for self-rule to the Muslim assertion over Khilafat question. He declared that 'In the proper solution of the Mahomedan question lies the realisation of Swarajya'. This endeavour brought about an unprecedented Hindu-Muslim unity which was reflected in the subsequent mass mobilisations against the colonial rule. During the anti-Rowlatt agitations, Hindus and Muslims demonstrated together, and symbols of unity were made overtly public. The Khilafat leaders exhorted the Muslims not to kill cows for the Bakr-Id festival; an Arya Samaj leader, Swami Shraddhanand, was requested to give a speech from the pulpit of Jama Masjid in Delhi; in Amritsar, Dr. Saifuddin Kitchlew was given the keys of the Golden Temple; in Calcutta, Hindus were admitted for the first time to the Nakhuda Mosque; in Bombay, the leaders of both communities actively tried to sell banned political literature. There were similar shows of unity throughout the movement.

On 20 March 1919, a Khilafat Committee was formed in Bombay. Prominent local Muslim merchants were on the Committee which initially took a moderate stand, and their activities were restricted to meetings, petitions and deputations to secure a better treatment for Turkey at the Peace Conference. It was, however, the *ulama*-driven militant trend which pushed the movement beyond its narrow confines. The advocates of a militant movement gave whole-hearted support to the anti-Rowlatt agitation and wanted to launch a non-cooperation movement against the colonial government. An all-India Khilafat Day was observed on 17 October 1919 which was a huge success. The markets were closed; fasting, prayers, meetings and *hartals* were observed. In Delhi, Madras and Bombay, there were huge audiences gathered to hear their leaders. It was clear that the new Muslim leadership was reaching a much broader urban audience. In its wake, an all-India Khilafat Conference was organised in Delhi on 23-24 November 1919 in which Gandhi was also called. The Conference passed some important resolutions in case unjust treatment was meted out to Turkey during the peace settlement: boycott of peace celebrations by Muslims, non-cooperation with the government, and boycott of British goods. Gandhi was declared to be the leader under whose guidance the movement would be carried forward and who commanded the respect of both the Hindus and the Muslims. Gandhi himself wanted all-round support for his nationalist cause and, therefore, he was not averse to the idea of bringing the two movements together provided they

conformed to his method of politics. Thus, early in 1920 he declared that the Khilafat issue was more important than constitutional reforms and even the Punjab atrocities, and he was prepared to launch a movement of non-cooperation if the peace terms were antagonistic to the interests of Turkey. Besides this, other issues necessitating a wider movement were also present. The government had refused to rescind the Rowlatt Act, the Hunter Committee appointed to enquire into the Punjab atrocities tried to shield the guilty, the British House of Lords had voted in favour of General Dyer's heinous crimes, and in Britain, 30,000 pounds had been collected from the public as a gift to Dyer.

The terms of the Peace Treaty, which became public in May 1920, were a blow to the wishes of the Khilafat leaders. The Ottoman Empire controlled by the Turks was dismembered. The Arab countries were declared independent of the Ottoman Empire; Syria, Palestine and Mesopotamia were put under French and British mandates; Eastern Thrace and Smyrna were ceded to Greece; and although Constantinople remained with Turkey, the Straits were internationalised. Such disregard of their sentiments hurt most of Indian Muslims very much. In a series of meetings held by the Khilafat Conference and in a meeting held along with Congress members on 1-2 June 1920 in Allahabad, it was decided to begin a programme of non-cooperation towards the government which would include:

- renunciation of titles conferred by the government,
- resignation from all kinds of government jobs, including military and police, and
- non-payment of taxes to the government.

Both Gandhiji and the Khilafat leaders were keen to start the non-cooperation movement as soon as possible. However, for this the support of the Congress was necessary. Certain leaders of the Congress were opposed to this move as they felt that a movement on a religious issue like the Khilafat would not be conducive for the growth of Indian polity. Their apprehensions were justified to some extent. The vocabulary of the Khilafat movement was entirely Muslim-oriented and filled with Islamic ideology and rhetoric. The arguments of even the best nationalists among them, such as Maulana Azad, was in support of allying with one set of non-Muslims (i.e., the Hindus) against another set of non-Muslims (i.e., the British). Through the entire course of the movement, the emphasis was on the separate existence of two communities and the need to unite them against the British who were considered as aggressors against both the Khalifa in Turkey and the Muslims and Hindus in India. So, although the Khilafat movement was anti-imperialist in orientation, the language of its articulation was basically Islamic.

However, at another level, strong nationalist sentiments were expressed during the course of the movement and constant appeals for communal amity were made. Moreover, the Khilafat leaders whole-heartedly supported the nationalist anti-imperialist movement like Rowlatt Satyagraha launched by Mahatma Gandhi and the Congress and exhorted the Muslims to fully participate in this which resulted in the immense success of this agitation. Gandhi and Shaukat Ali together toured throughout the country mobilising support for the cause of non-cooperation. Other Khilafat leaders were also active in rallying support for the cause under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi. Thus, it may be said that during the summer of the 1920, there was a convergence of these two movements.

12.5 MAIN PHASES

The non-cooperation movement was formally launched on 1 August 1920. That day was also marked by the death of Bal Gangadhar Tilak which witnessed strikes and processions to mourn the passing away of this great national leader.

A special session of the Congress was held in Calcutta in September 1920 to finally deliberate and decide the issue of non-cooperation. It gave its assent to non-cooperation, despite some opposition by those interested in Council entry. By the time of the regular Congress Session in December 1920 held at Nagpur, the programme of non-cooperation was accepted without opposition. It involved the surrender of government titles and honorary positions, boycott of government schools and colleges, law courts, and foreign cloths. It could also be extended to include resignation from government service and non-payment of government taxes. Moreover, it was decided to set up national schools and colleges, establish and strengthen the panchayats for settlement of disputes, promotion of hand spinning and weaving, condemnation and renunciation of untouchability, maintenance of communal amity and strict observance of non-violence. Thus, for the first time, an open extra-constitutional programme of mass mobilisation was started by the Congress.

From January to March 1921, the main emphasis of the movement was on the boycott of government schools, colleges and law courts, and the use of *charkha*. Thousands of students left schools and colleges and joined 800 national schools and colleges that had come up throughout the country. There were massive student strikes in Calcutta and Lahore, and the educational boycott was particularly successful in Bengal and Punjab. Although the boycott of the law courts was not as successful, many leading lawyers of the country like C.R. Das, Motilal Nehru, Saifuddin Kitchlew, C. Rajagopalachari, M.R. Jayakar, Vallabhbhai Patel, Asaf Ali and T. Prakasham quit their practice. The boycott of foreign cloth became a very successful programme. Thousands of volunteers moved from house to house trying to convince people about the necessity to adopt Swadeshi. The foreign-made clothes were collected and set on fire. There was also picketing of shops selling foreign cloth. The impact of this was enormous. The value of import of such merchandise fell from Rs. 102 crore in 1920-21 to Rs. 57 crore in 1921-22. Import of British cotton piecegoods declined from 1292 million yards in 1920-21 to 955 million in 1921-22. Many merchants took vow not to deal in foreign cloth. Another type of boycott movement was against liquor and toddy shops leading to a substantial fall in government revenue. Excise revenue declined in Punjab by Rs. 33 lakhs and in Madras by about Rs. 65 lakhs.

The next phase of the movement may be said to have started from the Vijayawada session of the Congress held in March 1921. It was decided to concentrate in the next three months on enrolling one crore members for the party, collecting one crore rupees for the Tilak Swaraj Fund and distributing and installing 20 lakh *charkhas*. This phase also achieved its objectives to a large extent: Tilak fund was oversubscribed, 50 lakh members were enrolled and *charkhas* were widely popularised and khadi became the dress of the movement.

The third phase of the movement witnessed its high points in the an challenging speech by Mohammed Ali in July 1921 declaring it 'religiously unlawful for the Muslims to continue in the British Army' and asking them to resign and in the successful boycott of the visit of the Prince of Wales in November 1921. The

colonial government immediately arrested Mohammed Ali along with some other leaders. Another important nationalist campaign during this phase was against the visit by the Prince of Wales. As soon as he landed in Bombay on 17 November, he was greeted with city-wide strikes and demonstrations which sometimes culminated in riots. Wherever he went there were strikes and demonstrations.

In the fourth phase, both the non-cooperators and the government appeared in confrontationist mood. Khilafat leaders like Hasrat Mohani were in favour of demanding complete independence from the British rule. At the ground level the Congress was influential among a very large number of people and its Volunteer Corps became almost a parallel police force. The Congress had sanctioned its provincial committees to start civil disobedience movement wherever it was felt necessary. The government, on the other hand, had started using repression as its official policy. There were large-scale arrests, ban on meetings and prohibition of the volunteer corps. The threat of violence on both sides was increasing and it was extremely disturbing to Gandhiji who not only abhorred violence particularly among the non-cooperators but also feared that intensive state repression would crush the movement. His apprehensions proved correct when on 5 February 1922, in Chauri-Chaura in Gorakhpur district the police provoked a crowd of demonstrators. The people attacked the policemen who then fired on them. Angered by this the people set fire to the police station building in which many policemen died. When Gandhiji heard this violent incident, he decided to withdraw the movement which was later ratified by the Congress Working Committee.

Soon after Gandhiji was arrested on 10 March 1922 and was sentenced to 6 years in jail. The Khilafat movement also declined due to several national and international factors. The withdrawal of non-cooperation was a severe blow and the Khilafat leaders reacted angrily to the decision of withdrawal. Even the international situation was not favourable. The Turks themselves under the leadership of Mustafa Kemal first abolished the Ottoman sultanate in 1922 and then did away with the office of the Khalifa itself in 1924. After this, there was little justification for the movement to continue.

The withdrawal of the movement after the incident at Chauri Chaura has been interpreted in a variety of ways. Gandhi's contemporaries such as Motilal Nehru, Subhash Bose, Jawaharlal Nehru and others viewed it as a question involving violence. Later Marxist commentators such as R.P Dutt and A.R. Desai introduced a class angle arguing that it was the fear of an outburst from the masses that led to the decision to withdraw. In this view, both Gandhi and the British were on one side as both did not want this. More professional historians such as Sumit Sarkar and Gyanendra Pandey linked the withdrawal of the movement to the Gandhi's and Congress' need to retain control and the political undesirability of a spontaneous outburst. The fear of losing control over the movement prompted its withdrawal. Bipan Chandra, on the other hand, particularly in his later writings, viewed it as part of a long-term nationalist strategy to carry out the anti-imperialist movement in phases so as to gain wider hegemony. Shahid Amin has looked at the Non-cooperation movement, particularly the Chauri Chaura incident, from a completely different angle probing how the people understood Gandhi in their own ways and used his name as a legitimising device to do their own things. Therefore it was perfectly consistent for people to participate in violent incidents in the name of Gandhi.

12.6 CONTRIBUTION OF THE MOVEMENTS IN ANTI-IMPERIALIST STRUGGLES

The Khilafat and non-cooperation movements played extremely important role in generating and spreading anti-imperialist consciousness among Indian people. To begin with, there was a remarkable unity between various communities. The Hindus and Muslims together participated in the movement throughout the country and often it was difficult to distinguish between non-cooperation and Khilafat meetings. Despite the Malabar happenings, in which the Muslim peasants revolted against their largely Hindu landlords and killed and converted scores of them, the Hindu-Muslim unity remained intact throughout the period. At some places, two-thirds of those arrested during the non-cooperation movement were Muslims. Gandhi played the most important role in bringing about and sustaining this relationship.

Another important issue which the non-cooperation movement brought to the fore was the need to fight against caste discrimination and untouchability. Gandhi must be credited for emphatically bringing this issue to forefront of the national politics for the first time. From then on this issue would remain quite important for the nationalist politics. The need for social justice was clearly acknowledged, pushed forward and was later enshrined in the Constitution of independent India.

Strong anti-colonial movements were afoot among various sections of population. Peasants and workers were particularly active during this period, besides the middle classes in both the urban and rural areas. Several peasant and worker movements occurred during this period. In 1921 alone there were 396 strikes involving 600,351 workers and a loss of 6,994,426 workdays. Peasant movements were even more prominent. In Awadh region of the United Provinces, in Mewar in Rajsthan, and in many districts of north Bihar there were very strong peasant movements involving millions of people. Even in the urban areas the participation by various middle class groups was unprecedented throughout the country. Moreover, Gandhi's insistence on non-violence brought a large number of women into the movement. Such mobilisation of women was a very significant phenomenon both for the nationalist movement as well as for the liberation of women from the boundaries of their houses.

Thus, these movements under Gandhi's leadership of Mahatma Gandhi revolutionised the structure of Indian politics in several ways. The most significant success of the movement should be located in its mobilisation of various sections of people across the country and the creation of political and social consciousness in them. The common people now became integral to the project of nationalism.

12.7 SUMMARY

The Khilafat issue was of central concern to the Indian Muslims in the wake of the British pressure on Turkey and the impending reduction in size of the Ottoman Empire after First World War. These religious sentiments became even more intensified due to Britain's presence as a colonial power in India. Thus, the religious and anti-imperialist feelings of Indian Muslims produced a very strong reaction against the British colonial rule. On the other hand, the failure of the colonial government to fulfill their promise of some measure of self-government

for the Indians after the War created resentment among politically active groups. In addition to this, the Rowlatt Act further hurt the feelings of a large number of Indians, and the Jallianwala Bagh massacre following the anti-Rowlatt agitation was the last straw. At this moment, Gandhiji provided an able leadership and united various strands of these anti-imperialist movements which developed into the non-cooperation movement involving millions of rural and urban people across the country. Although the movement failed to attain its objectives of either saving the Khalifa or to secure self-government for India, it mobilised a large number of people and imbued them with consciousness about their political rights. The small, powerless people in the dusty corners of the country stood against the mightiest of the empires in the world and raised their voice for freedom. In itself, it was the most significant achievement any movement could aspire to.

12.8 EXERCISES

- 1) Discuss the nature of the Khilafat movement and its role in formation of the Non-cooperation movement.
- 2) What was the programme of the Non-cooperation movement?
- 3) What were the major achievements of the Non-cooperation movement?



UNIT 13 REVOLUTIONARY TRENDS*

Structure

- 13.1 Introduction
- 13.2 Background
- 13.3 Early Developments
- 13.4 Early Founts of Ideological Inspiration
- 13.5 Beginnings of a New Revolutionary Spirit
- 13.6 Birth of HRA
 - 13.6.1 Ideology and Programme of HRA
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 - 13.7.2 Assembly Bomb Explosion
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 - 13.7.4 Chittagong Armoury Raid
- 13.8 Summary
- 13.9 Exercises

13.1 INTRODUCTION

The emergence of revolutionary thinking in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was the result of several internal and external influences working on the minds of the young men. The most vital factor was the growth of religious revival of the late nineteenth century. Besides this, there were several foreign influences, like the impact of the American War of Independence, the Irish struggle for freedom, the unification of Italy, the lives of Mazzini and Garibaldi, the Japanese victory over Russia and last but not the least, the revolution against the Tsarist regime in Russia. All these factors together introduced in the nationalist struggle a strong revolutionary element.

13.2 BACKGROUND

The Indian National Congress was founded in 1885 by the liberal politicians and succeeded in bringing together educated, upper class Indians on a common political platform. The Congress party, although representing the most progressive sections of Indian society, failed to keep pace with the wave of nationalism which was sweeping over India during the closing years of the nineteenth century. The renaissance had led to a rediscovery of an ancient Indian past. The spirit of militancy came in the wake of religious awakening, which lent its support to Hindu revivalism and strengthened the feelings of respect for national traditions. There was a curious blending of religion with politics. Most of the revolutionary leaders of this period were deeply religious men. They loved their country and loved everything Indian. There was contempt for alien rule and alien things, Western education, Western thought and Western ways of living.

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Maharashtra and Bengal emerged as the two powerful centres of the revolutionary activities. B.G. Tilak and V.D. Savarkar provided the ideas, organisation and leadership in Maharashtra, while Bankim Chandra, Aurobindo Ghosh and Swami Vivekanand did the same in Bengal. Tilak offered the revolutionary and political interpretation of *Gita* and was deeply inspired by *Bhagwat Gita*'s clarion call to duty and Krishna's exhortation to Arjun. Tilak also re-oriented the Shivaji and Ganapati festivals for political purpose and militant dreams. His speeches, writings and activities inspired the young Chapekar brothers to form *Hindu Dharm Sanrakshini Sabha*, which was responsible for the assassination of several hated British officers. Stirred by the suffering and martyrdom of Chapekar brothers, V.D. Savarkar started an association called the *Mitra Mela* at Nasik in 1900. It was changed into *Abhinav Bharat Society* in 1904 and shifted to Poona. The title was taken from *Young Italy* of Mazzini. This society actively took part in organizing meetings, bringing out publications and celebrating Ganapati and Shivaji festivals.

The revolutionary movement in Bengal derived its inspiration from the works of Bankim Chandra Chatterji and the exhortations of Swami Vivekanand. The other notable contributor to the revolutionary creed was Aurobindo Ghosh. Pramathanath Mitra launched an organisation in 1901, called *Anushilan Samiti*, a name taken from Bankim's writings. It was joined by Aurobindo Ghosh, C.R. Das, Barindra Ghosh and Jatin Bannerjee. *Bhagwat Gita* was used in different ways in several publications. The greeting *Bande Mataram* (Hail Mother) of *Anand Math* became a war cry of the extremist party in Bengal. Bankim gave a religious significance to the idea of motherland by declaring that in the image of the benign goddess *Durga* could be seen the future greatness of the Motherland. The new revolutionary gospel or cult of *Shakti* called upon the Bengalis to shed the blood of their oppressors.

Though religious revival generated contempt for the imperialists and instilled a yearning for independence, it alienated a sizable population of Muslims from its ranks. It seems that the ideologues of this period articulated their nationalist appeal in such a tightly structured manner that there appeared no possibility for any outsider to share their vision of 'Hindu nationalism'.

As mentioned before, the Indian revolutionary movement was further influenced by the lives of Mazzini, Garibaldi, several Irish revolutionaries, the victory of Japan over Russia in 1905 and the revolutionary principles of France, America and Russia. B.C. Pal held Mazzini to be one of the principal sources of the birth of new nationalism in India. Annie Besant also compared Mazzini and Aurobindo and described them as the men of the same type. V.D. Savarkar translated Mazzini's Autobiography into Marathi.

13.3 EARLY DEVELOPMENTS

When the revolutionary ideas were gaining ground under these influences, the partition of Bengal in 1905 fell like a bomb shell. The revolutionary forces discerned the old game of 'counterpoise of native against native' and the 'divide and rule' in the disguise of administrative efficiency. The people began to emulate Russian methods and an attempt was made to kill an ex-Magistrate of Dacca on December 23, 1907. The next target was Kingsford, the magistrate of Muzaffarpur, who had ordered several youngmen to be flogged. At Muzaffarpur, Khudi Ram

Bose and Prafulla Chaki threw a bomb on two innocent British ladies by mistake as they were traveling in a carriage similar to Mr. Kingsford. On the upshot of the Muzaffarpur case, Tilak remarked that ‘the appearance of the bomb in India had changed the outlook of Indian politics.’ He urged the government of India that ‘the answer to the bomb was political reform and not repression.’

Sachindranath Sanyal founded *Anushilan Samiti* at Benares in 1908, which was later rechristened as Young Men’s Association. Hardayal along with Amir Chand and Dinanath also became active. But Hardayal left for U.S.A. in 1911. So, till the arrival of Rash Behari Bose, the Delhi group remained languid. Bose activated the group and started a magazine called *Liberty* which taught people to make bombs. Soon an attempt was made on Viceroy Lord Hardinge’s life on December 23, 1912 in which he escaped unhurt. The organisers of this attempt issued a bulletin and commended the attempt on the Viceroy’s life. It invoked the authority of religious scriptures to justify the attempt on Viceroy’s life: ‘The *Gita*, the *Vedas* and the *Koran* all enjoin us to kill all the enemies of our Motherland irrespective of caste, creed or colour.’ Rash Behari escaped arrest while four persons were hanged in this Delhi Conspiracy Case. Rash Behari Bose and his associates next made a novel attempt at simultaneous uprising with the help of Indian soldiers. The plan leaked out before the appointed date of February 21, 1915 and all prominent revolutionaries were rounded up. Rash Behari again evaded arrest and reached Japan to continue this revolutionary struggle.

The British policy of repression led to the many conspiracy cases in which several revolutionaries were eliminated. There was a lull in the revolutionary activities, but Gendalal Dixit of Mainpuri kept the torch of revolution burning for some time. He was soon arrested in the Mainpuri Conspiracy Case and died after his release in the tragic circumstances. The leaders, who evaded arrest and secretly left the country, continued their struggle from the land of their exile. Many of them chose America because the Indian revolutionaries thought of America as being ‘the land of freedom and opportunity.’ Hardayal started a paper called *Ghadar* in May 1913 from San Francisco. Later *Ghadar* party was named after the name of the paper. The party was strictly secular and the aim of the *Ghadar* party was to overthrow the British *Raj* in India and to establish the *Panchayat Raj* (Republican State) based on freedom and equality.

The *Ghadar* spirit also travelled to the Far East and its branch was established by Barkatullah Khan in Japan and some others did the same in Hong Kong and Shanghai. With the outbreak of the Great War, Kabul also became a rendezvous of some leading rebels. It was here that a provisional government of India was established by Raja Mahendra Pratap, who became its President and Barkatullah, its Prime Minister.

13.4 EARLY FOUNTS OF IDEOLOGICAL INSPIRATION

The activities, writings and the speeches of the revolutionaries of this period reveal a strong religious bias, romanticism and emotionalism. Many of them were convinced that “a purely political propaganda would not do for the country, and that people must be trained up spiritually to face dangers.” But their religion was different from the one practised by the majority of the people of the country.

They were puritans to a certain extent. This was so because they thought it indispensable for the life of a revolutionary. At the same time they were against all sorts of narrow mindedness and prejudices which erect barriers between man and man. Despite the dominance of religiosity, the revolutionary groups were not totally devoid of a secular or even anti-religious trends. Bhupendradra Nath Dutta refused to take a vow on Hindu *shastras* alone. Some of the early revolutionaries complained that the Hindu rituals were alienating possible Muslim sympathisers. Hemchandra Kanungo and his comrades at Midnapore provided further strength to the anti-religious stance of a number of revolutionaries. Interestingly, three out of four early martyrs including Satyendranath Basu, Kanailal Dutta, and Khudiram Basu were among the sceptics.

No doubt, there were weaknesses in the ideology of the early revolutionaries and there were defects inherent in their reliance on religious teachings for advancing the cause of revolution, yet it is also clear beyond any shadow of doubt that to the staunch revolutionaries the emancipation of India through armed struggle was the supreme goal and that they looked upon religion only as a means to serve this end. This aspect should not be lost sight of or underestimated while making an assessment of the earlier phase of the revolutionary movement. They initiated the search for a revolutionary ideology and revolutionary programme by drawing lessons from our own history as well as from the histories of the revolutions in other countries. They did not preach social reform but broke down the barriers of age-old revered customs. They revolted against anything that tried to place obstacles in the path of the onward march of the revolutionary movement. Their weaknesses of emotionalism and romanticism could be overcome only by the realisation that revolution is a social process governed by definite laws. This realisation dawned upon the revolutionaries with the impact of Bolshevik Revolution in Russia.

13.5 BEGINNINGS OF A NEW REVOLUTIONARY SPIRIT

The world economic situation worsened during the First World War. The peacetime industries and agriculture were in a miserable shape in all the belligerent countries. This was accompanied by direct and indirect taxes, which were levied on workers and peasants to replenish the empty treasury. The British government was aware of the storm of political feeling in India during the period of the First World War. The optimism generated by the Wilsonian sentiments, the solemn pledges during the war and the Montague Declaration of August 1917 was not enough to contain either the masses or the classes. They wanted these declarations to be matched by concrete actions. But all illusion about British promises was soon torn to shreds by the introduction of the Rowlatt Bill, calculated to smother free expression and political activities. The provisions of the Defence of India Act were to expire six months after the end of the war. The threat of revolutionary “terrorism” and Bolshevism goaded the British to arm its Indian administration with powers of preventive detention.

There was a chorus of universal condemnation joined even by the sophisticated elements of Indian polity like the moderates and the Congress. Gandhiji gave a call to organise protests and *hartals* all over the country. In the wake of this agitation, on 13th April 1919, the Jallianwala Bagh massacres took place at

Amritsar. It was an indirect gain to the tremendous growth of national consciousness in India. Gandhiji wrote to the Duke of Connaught in February 1921, “We are determined to battle with all our might against that un-English nature which has made Dyerism possible.” He launched the non-cooperation movement and the boycott of the British goods. He assured freedom by the midnight of December 31, 1921 and appealed to the revolutionaries to desist from their activities for one year. The revolutionaries assured Gandhi that they would suspend their violent activities for one year. Many of the students, in enthusiasm, gave up their studies at the Mahatma’s call and devoted wholeheartedly to the struggle for freedom. The economic and labour crisis of the time added fuel to the fire. However, the sudden suspension of the movement after Chauri Chaura led to utter frustration among Mahatma’s young cadres. Many youngmen like Chandra Shekhar Azad, Bhagat Singh, Sukhdev, Manmathnath Gupta and many others could not appreciate Gandhi’s concept of combining politics with morality which had dealt a fatal blow to the popular movement. They were drawn towards the violent creed and thus, the sudden bottling up of a great movement saw the revival of the revolutionary activities in India.

13.6 BIRTH OF HRA (HINDUSTAN REPUBLICAN ASSOCIATION)

Besides the frustration with the Gandhian experiment, the impact of the Bolshevik revolution was being felt more and more and this led to a widening of horizon among the revolutionary groups. ‘Socialism, though not clearly understood, was attracting their minds and the ideals of social justice which were in a nebulous form in the earlier period were turning towards taking a distinct shape.’ It was not only the young generation of revolutionaries which was exposed to the new ideas but the elders ‘have also started discussing Soviet Revolution and Communism in 1924.’ The upsurge of the working class after the Great War greatly influenced all of them. They watched this new social force carefully. They could see the revolutionary potentialities of the new class and desired to harness it to the nationalist revolution.

With this objective, the revolutionaries of U.P. and Punjab set in motion an organisation called the Hindustan Republican Association (HRA) in 1924. The Constitution of the HRA declared its objective “to establish a Federated Republic of the United States of India by an organised and armed revolution.” The association envisaged that the “basic principle of the republic shall be universal suffrage and the abolition of all systems which make any kind of exploitation of man by man possible.” It was committed to “the organisation of labour and *kisans*” as it was necessary for the successful struggle against capitalism and feudalism. The programme of the HRA reveals that its members and founders had become advanced in their ideas. They were not inspired only by the *Bhagwat Gita*, *Anandmath*, Aurobindo, Vivekanand and the militant nationalists but they have also read about Russian, French and Irish revolutions. Jogesh Chandra Chatterji, its principal founder, was exposed to socialist thought in jail during 1916 and 1920.

13.6.1 Ideology and Programme of HRA

The Hindustan Republican Association shifted ideologically from a narrow selfless patriotism to a vague sort of socialism—and even internationalism. This

came out clearly, in its pamphlet entitled '*The Revolutionary*' published on January 1, 1925, and which was said to be the manifesto of the revolutionary party of India. This pamphlet revealed to a very large public that the revolutionaries were committed to certain lofty social ideals. The pamphlet '*The Revolutionary*' began with the words of Nietzsche that "Chaos is necessary to the birth of a new star" and the birth of life is accompanied by agony and pain. India is also taking a new birth, and is passing through that inevitable phase, when chaos, and agony shall play their destined role, when all calculations shall prove futile, when the wise and mighty shall be bewildered by the simple and weak, when great empires shall crumble down, and new nations shall arise and surprise humanity with the splendour and glory which shall be all its own. The HRA, crossing the barriers of narrow nationalism, proclaimed in its manifesto: 'The revolutionary party is not national but international in the sense that its ultimate object is to bring harmony in the world by respecting and guaranteeing the diverse pointed interests of the different nations; it aims not at competition but at co-operation between the different nations and states.'

The HRA did believe and acted according to the methods of older revolutionaries. It also believed in the armed overthrow of the imperialist government. The manifesto categorically declared that the foreigners "have no justification to rule over India except the justification of the sword, and therefore the revolutionary party has taken to the sword." However, the advancement made by the HRA was spelt out clearly in the next sentence: "But the sword of the revolutionary party bears ideas at its edge."

13.6.2 Kakori Conspiracy Case

One of the major actions of HRA was Kakori Train dacoity Case, which is also known as Kakori Conspiracy Case. As pointed out above, the HRA did believe in armed action against the imperialist government, they planned this dacoity to generate money, which they desperately needed. On August 9, 1925, a group of HRA activists including Ram Prasad Bismil, Ashfaqullah Khan, Chandrashekhar Azad, Manmathnath Gupta, Rajen Lahiri and others stopped a train at Kakori near Lucknow and walked away with the government cash from the guard's coach. No innocent passenger was harmed. Within a few months, most of the revolutionaries were arrested and tried in the famous Kakori Conspiracy Case. Four of them including Bismil and Ashfaqullah were hanged while others were sentenced for different jail terms.

13.7 FORMATION AND ACTIVITIES OF HSRA (HINDUSTAN SOCIALIST REPUBLIC ASSOCIATION)

The late 1920s saw severe economic depression followed by intense labour upsurge. The Indian working class was increasingly coming under Bolshevik influence leading to the formation of a number of labour unions with distinct communist leanings. Besides, there were youth movements in 1928 and 1929, raising the demand for complete independence and radical social and economic changes. Both Jawaharlal Nehru and Subhas Bose organised the Independence for India League as a pressure group within the Congress to carry forward the campaign for acceptance of the goals of complete independence and what the

U.P. branch of the League in April, 1929 described as a ‘socialist democratic state in which every person has the fullest opportunities for development... (with) state control of the means of production and distribution.’ But once again, this left theoretical radicalism of the Congress could not find adequate expression in concrete action or organisation. Jawaharlal Nehru, when questioned by Gandhi, went back to the liberal, bourgeois politics of the Congress, leaving the youth charged but frustrated.

The HRA was frustrated with the verbal radicalism of the Congress, and was itself rendered weak and powerless after the Kakori Conspiracy Case. Thus it decided to rebuild the organisation. Most of the experienced revolutionaries were behind the bars and the rest were underground to escape arrest. In these circumstances, the young members of the HRA led by Bhagat Singh, Sukhdev, Shiv Verma, Chandra Shekhar Azad and Vijay Kumar Sinha, undertook the task of reorganising the party. A meeting of the important members was held in 1927 at Kanpur, primarily for this purpose. It was soon followed by another crucial meeting for the formation of the Central Committee of HRA on 8 and 9 September, 1928 in the romantic surroundings of the ruins of the *Feroz Shah Kotla* at Delhi. This was an important meeting which was attended by ten participants from U.P., Bihar, Punjab and Rajasthan. The meeting resulted in the adoption of a revolutionary programme with an advanced revolutionary socialist outlook for their organisation. Finally Bhagat Singh and his friends succeeded in convincing their critics who agreed to rechristen the association by including socialism as one of the main goals. Thus, the name of the Hindustan Republican Association was finally changed to Hindustan Socialist Republican Association.

The HRA aimed at the establishment of a Federal Republic of the United States of India where the basic principle would be adult suffrage, while the HSRA, as indicated by its name, proclaimed the goal of establishing a socialist republic. Long before this, Bhagat Singh and his comrades formed *Naujawan Bharat Sabha* in Lahore with a distinct goal of establishing a socialist republic in India. Bhagat Singh was convinced that the salvation of India lay not merely in political independence but in economic freedom. The newly formed HSRA also decided that the soldiers of the HSRA will leave their homes, keep no contact with their families and devote full time and energy for the party work. Religious communalism and ritualism were banned.

13.7.1 Simon Commission and the Revolutionaries

“The year 1928 was, politically, a full year,” writes Pandit Jawaharlal, “with plenty of activity all over the country.” The Trade union movement was pushing itself steadily and its militant ideology was fostering class consciousness among the workers. In this electrified atmosphere, the Simon Commission landed in Bombay on February 3, 1928. It was an all-white commission appointed to report and review the political situation of India. No Indian was given a place on the Commission which was considered an affront to national respect by all the political parties of the country. The major segments of the country unanimously decided to boycott the Commission. It was greeted with *hartal* in Bombay and slogans like ‘Go Back Simon’ were raised.

There were conflicts between the police and the people at various places but Lahore brought matters to a head. The anti-Simon Commission demonstration

was led by Lala Lajpat Rai in Lahore and as he stood by the roadside he was assaulted and hit on his chest with a baton by a young English police officer. For Lalaji, being a heart patient, a severe blow on the chest proved fatal. His death sent a wave of indignation and the young of the country took it as an insult to the nation. The HSRA decided to kill Scott, the Chief police executive, who was present on the spot.

Apprehending fear to his life Scott took shelter in the police training school from where he seldom came out. Later on Saunders, his deputy was chosen as the target and his movements were watched for several days. The December 17 1928 was fixed for Saunders' murder and Rajguru, Bhagat Singh and Chandra Shekhar Azad were entrusted with the responsibility. A great sensation spread in Lahore at the murder of the Deputy Superintendent of Police. The next day, red leaflets written in English were distributed by the HSRA men saying "Bureaucracy alerted. Lala Lajpat Rai's death is avenged by the murder of J.P. Saunders." The revolutionaries repeated their objective in the leaflet saying, "We are sorry for shedding the blood of a man but it is necessary to shed blood on the altar of revolution. We aim at such a revolution which would end exploitation of man by man." Though it became known that the Saunders' murder was an act of revolutionaries but the police failed to arrest them. Bhagat Singh, Rajguru and Azad escaped by adopting various guises.

13.7.2 Assembly Bomb Explosion

The HSRA planned to bomb the Assembly Hall if the Public Safety Bill and the Trade Disputes Bill were passed by the special powers of the Governor General. They wanted to show that if the government can ignore the voice of the majority and rush through the passage of the Bill by resorting to Governor General's powers, then the HSRA can also pay back in the same coin. These bills were brought by the Indian Government to suppress the struggle being waged against the establishment by the workers and revolutionaries. Bhagat Singh, while commenting on these bills said:

'There is no place for justice in British imperialism. They do not want to give even a breathing space to the slaves and instead, want to suppress them. They want to rob them and kill them. More and more oppressive laws will be passed and the dissenting voices will be put down. Let us see what happens. Only sacrifice can save us from this suppression. The eyes of Indian and British members of the Assembly will have to be opened.'

He felt that the awakening of the working class indicated a new turn in the political life of the country. Thus, he wanted the HSRA to do an 'action' which should express the solidarity of the party with the labour and peasant movement. The Central Committee of HSRA at first decided to send Jaidev Kapoor and B.K. Dutt to throw the bombs, but on Sukhdev's exhortation and friendly advice, Bhagat Singh accompanied B.K. Dutt. On 8th April, 1929, the deafening voice of the bomb explosion in the Assembly shook the empire to its foundations. Members of the Assembly ran helter skelter. Both the bombs exploded without doing serious harm to anyone. The young men could have escaped under the cover of smoke but they held their ground and shouted slogans at the top of their voice:

“Long Live Revolution”

“Down with Imperialism”

“Workers of the World Unite”

They threw bundles of red leaflets on behalf of HSRA and gave its message to the whole world. The message began with the quotation of the French revolutionary Valliant: “It takes a loud voice to make the deaf hear.” Both of them were arrested on the spot. Thus occurred the great event, which sent a chill down the spine of British imperialism and gladdened the hearts of freedom fighters throughout the world. Bhagat Singh used the court as a platform to popularise the cult of socialism. Bhagat Singh’s statement made it clear that the HSRA was, in the true sense, fighting for the masses and also specified that he intended to bring about a classless society. Within a few months, the court found them guilty of waging a war against the state and transported both of them for life on June 12 1929. However, Bhagat Singh was taken to Lahore to stand trial in the Lahore Conspiracy Case for the killing of J P Saunders.

13.7.3 Lahore Conspiracy Case

The trial went on for about two years, and the revolutionaries used the court platform very effectively to clear the misunderstandings being spread by the government about them. They even organised long hunger strikes to fight for better living conditions and facilities for all the political prisoners in jail who were treated like ordinary criminals by the British government. One of the revolutionaries Jatin Das sacrificed his life on September 13 1929, after 63 days of hunger strike, which caused a huge uproar in the whole of India. Finally, Bhagat Singh, Sukhdev and Rajguru were hanged on March 23 1931 on the banks of river Sutlej. The execution of the three martyrs was condemned all over the country and Bhagat Singh in particular became a household name.

13.7.4 Chittagong Armoury Raid

While Bhagat Singh and his associates were in prison and facing trial in the Lahore Conspiracy Case, Surya Sen planned a revolutionary action in Bengal called the Chittagong Armoury Raid. The well organised raid was conducted on April 18 1930 under the leadership of Surya Sen, popularly called Master da. They took control of the telegraph office as well as telephone exchange and cut off all communication channels to Calcutta and Dacca and the other group took control of the club. They distributed leaflets explaining the object of the raid, the leaflets were signed by Surya Sen as president of the Indian Republican Army, Chittagong branch. The attacks continued for few years and gradually the revolutionaries were arrested and punished in sham trials. Surya Sen himself was arrested in February 1933, while Kalpana Dutt and Tarakeshwar Dastidar were captured on May 19 1933. In the Armoury Raid Case, Surya Sen and Dastidar were sentenced to death while several others were sentenced for life imprisonment. Surya Sen was hanged on January 12 1934 in Chittagong jail with his last message of “ideal and unity” and “a golden dream...a dream of free India.”

13.8 SUMMARY

The revolutionary groups remained active till the mid 1930s but later most of the groups were weakened due to arrests and propaganda. However, they had an

important role in creating an upsurge and awareness among the youth, which was constructively harnessed by mass movements led by the Mahatma. We normally ignore this important contribution of the revolutionary actions from early sporadic ones to Saunders' murder, Assembly Bomb explosion to Chittagong Conspiracy Case. Despite the fact that the Indian National Congress remained in the forefront, fighting for Indian independence, we cannot ignore the immense contributions made by the Indian revolutionaries in advancing the cause of freedom.

13.9 EXERCISES

- 1) Discuss the early developments of revolutionary movement in India.
- 2) What were the differences between HRA and HSRA?
- 3) Discuss the ideology and activities of the revolutionaries during the late 1920s and early 1930s.



UNIT 14 RESISTANCE WITHIN AND OUTSIDE THE COUNCILS*

Structure

- 14.1 Introduction
- 14.2 Background
- 14.3 Essence of Swarajism
- 14.4 Swarajists at the Polls
- 14.5 Swarajists in the Assembly and in the Councils
- 14.6 Major Accomplishments of the Swaraj Party
- 14.7 Swarajism after 1926: Decline, Disintegration, Merger
- 14.8 Simon Commission: Return of Non-Cooperation
- 14.9 Gandhian Constructive Programme
- 14.10 Summary
- 14.11 Exercises

14.1 INTRODUCTION

The period after the withdrawal of the non-cooperation movement and the beginning of the civil disobedience can be best understood through the activities of the Swaraj Party. The importance of the Swaraj Party is that it introduced a new strand of political activity within the nationalist movement, that of council entry. It extended the area of the nationalist movement to the heart of legislative politics and the constitutional arena. Later, in the 1930s, this became a fairly dominant strand within Congress politics, when in 1937 Congress contested elections and formed governments in seven provinces.

The period between the two agitations is very important. During this period the national movement was carried on and sustained, not by direct agitation against the British, but through the activities of the Swaraj Party and Gandhi's constructive programme. It is important to recognise that whereas the nature of the activities of the national movement underwent a change during this period, it did not imply a break or a discontinuation in the basic trajectory of the national movement. In this Unit, we will discuss this period (1922-29), will focus on the context in which the Swaraj Party was born, and also talk about the nature of the constructive programme initiated by Gandhi. Towards the end, the Unit will also introduce to you the Nehru Report as the direct extension of the activities of the Swaraj Party and the controversies that revolved around it.

14.2 BACKGROUND

Swarajism may be understood as a 'political experiment' within the long life of the national movement. The essence of this experiment was that the national movement, in order to be successful, must reach out to all arenas of political life and activity. In other words, it meant extending the national movement to the

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legislative bodies also. Colonial rule was to be questioned and challenged inside the Legislatures. Motilal Nehru and Chittaranjan Das were the main protagonists of this idea. They gave it a concrete shape by forming a Swaraj Party within Congress in 1923. There was a background and a context to the birth of the idea of Swarajism.

The impetus to the Swarajist politics was provided by the nature of the Government of India Act of 1919 and the withdrawal of the non-cooperation movement in 1922. Let us briefly look at the two.

The end of the First World War had raised great hopes and expectations among Indians of getting important constitutional benefits from the British. All such hopes turned into bitter disappointment with the promulgation of the GOI Act of 1919. It was believed that in some ways the Act of 1919 was even more retrograde than the Act of 1909. The main disappointment of the Indians pertained to the fact that a substantial proportion of seats in the legislative bodies, both at the centre and in the provinces, were to be filled by non-elected members nominated by the government. Out of a total of 145 members, as many as 40 were to be nominated by the government. This reduced the power of the elected members quite significantly. Under the Act of 1919, first elections were to be held in 1920. Under the non-cooperation movement, boycott (of titles, educational institutions of the government, law courts and the legislatures) was one of the weapons of the movement. It was in these circumstances that C.R. Das, prominent Congress leader from Bengal, argued that instead of boycotting the legislatures, Congressmen should contest elections, enter the Assemblies and oppose British government from there. The proposal was rejected by the All India Congress Committee (AICC). This was the beginning of the idea of Swarajism.

The non-cooperation movement was suddenly brought to a halt in May 1922 following the violence at Chauri Chaura. Almost immediately after the withdrawal of the movement, Gandhi was arrested and sentenced to six years imprisonment. At this point the national movement was at a crossroad and there were two important questions confronting the Congress leadership:

- Should the non-cooperation movement be resumed again or not?
- What should be the Congress stand on the 1923 elections to the legislatures?

To get a sense of the mood of the people on these questions, the AICC constituted an enquiry committee in June 1922. The committee consisted of Hakim Ajmal Khan, Vitthalbhai Patel, Motilal Nehru, Srinivas Aiyangar, M.A. Ansari and C. Rajagopalachari. The committee toured the country and submitted its report. All the members unanimously agreed that the country was not ready for a round of non-cooperation. On the question of council-entry, however, there was a difference of opinion. Ajmal Khan, Vitthalbhai Patel and Motilal Nehru were in favour of council entry by Congressmen and the remaining members were against it.

In months to come, this minor division within the committee acquired large proportions and it looked as if this question might split the entire Congress organisation. The advocates of council entry came to be identified as pro-changers and the opponents were called no-changers. Rajendra Prasad and Vallabhbhai Patel were the other important no-changers. Since the AICC was unable to come to a conclusion on this issue, the final decision was left for the annual session of the Congress to be held at Gaya in December 1922. Chittaranjan Das was the president of the Congress at this time.

At the Gaya session of the Congress the real differences between the two groups came to the fore. The pro-changers wanted Congressmen to contest elections, enter the legislative bodies and put up stiff resistance to the British inside the legislatures. The no-changers, on the other hand, believed that council entry would dilute the spirit of non-cooperation and amount to cooperation with the British. Instead of council entry they suggested that the national movement should be advanced by carrying on Gandhi's constructive programme. Constructive programme consisted of promoting Hindu-Muslim unity, Khadi and a social campaign against untouchability. Both the groups campaigned for their respective course of action. The final decision was left for the general session of the Congress. The general Congressmen voted for the no-changers. They got 1740 votes as against 890 for the pro-changers. The verdict of the Congress was overwhelmingly against council entry. Since this decision was against the thinking of president C.R. Das, he resigned from Congress presidentship.

The pro-changers were defeated but not demoralised. They realised that a fairly large section of Congressmen was in favour of council entry. Therefore immediately after the Gaya Congress, they convened a meeting of their supporters and decided to form a new party within the Congress. They gave it the name of Congress Khilafat Swaraj Party. C.R. Das was the president and Motilal Nehru the general secretary of the new party.

The formation of a new group within the Congress created an atmosphere of mutual suspicion. The possibility of a split within Congress became quite imminent. Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, the new president of the Congress, tried to bring about unity between the two groups but did not succeed. In early 1924, the British government released Gandhi on account of his deteriorating health. Gandhi was initially completely opposed to the pro-changers and he refused to treat council-entry as part of the Congress programme of non-cooperation. Gradually however, a compromise was worked out between Gandhi and Chittaranjan Das at the Belgaum session of the Congress in 1924. Under the new agreement, the Congress leadership agreed to treat 'Swarajism' as the official part of the Congress programme. A split in the Congress was thus averted.

14.3 ESSENCE OF SWARAJISM

The naming of the Swaraj Party (Congress Khilafat Swaraj Party) was done with a great deal of thought. At the time of its formation, many people within the Congress had misgivings about the party. They considered it as anti-Congress and pro-British. The first task of the party after its formation was to remove these misunderstandings. They had full agreement with Congress-Khilafat alliance and they also did not project their party as an alternative to Congress. Rather they emphasised the Congress connection by considering their Swarajist experiment to be a part of Congress programme. Probably the earliest justification for the existence of Swaraj Party was provided by Motilal Nehru in a statement. He argued that, under changed circumstances, the boycott of legislatures had become obsolete and, therefore, the policy of boycott should be changed. The statement, signed by Motilal Nehru, Ajmal Khan and Vithalbhai Patel, said:

'Times have now changed. Circumstances have altered. The period of struggle is indefinitely prolonged. Measures affecting the daily life of the people are being enacted in the legislature year after year. Fresh taxation and huge liabilities are

being imposed with the help and in the name of the so-called representatives of the people, and *nolens volens* [willingly or unwillingly] the people will have to submit to them. Under these circumstances it is a question for consideration how far the hold of the Congress over the masses can remain unaffected. Suppose the Congress persists in the boycott of the councils in its present form, and it is found that a greater percentage of voters record their votes on the occasion, our claim would be discredited. We are inclined to believe that the policy of abstention has lost its charm, and it is likely that a greater percentage of voters will vote at the ensuing elections. In that event, the success gained at the last elections will be a thing of the past and the whole movement will be adversely affected.’ (Quoted in D.G. Tendulkar, *Mahatma: Life of Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi*, Vol. 2, 1951, New Delhi, p. 113).

Both Motilal Nehru and C.R. Das believed that ‘Swarajism’ was an effective way in which the constitutional credibility of British imperialism could be eroded. Through the Acts of 1909 and 1919 the British had tried to assert the constitutional basis of their rule. They had also claimed (through their declaration of self-rule in 1917) that they were gradually preparing Indians for democracy and self-government. The Swarajism, as conceived by the leaders of the Swaraj Party, was an attempted rebuttal of these British claims. They believed that by entering the legislatures they can make the constitutional experiment of the British null and void. C.R. Das made this point clear in a statement: “We have so far boycotted the Councils from the outside...It should now be the duty of Congress to successfully boycott Councils from the inside.” He believed that the introduction of democracy as claimed by the Act of 1919 was a mere camouflage. The real power remained with the British bureaucracy. But this power of the bureaucracy could be effectively opposed only from within. Das emphasized the practical aspects of the Swarajist politics thus:

‘We will assert our basic rights in the Councils and the Assembly. For the acceptance and the protection of those rights we will demand a Constitution. It is quite probable that the British government will not agree to it. Then all the Swarajists will non-cooperate with the government bureaucracy. We will oppose every government Bill. We will not allow the budget to be passed. We will stall every proposal of the government. Thus we will defeat every Bill proposed by the government.’

Some Congressmen accused Swarajists of practising negative and obstructionist politics. Replying to this charge, Das said: “We are surrounded by British bureaucracy from all sides. Under these circumstances it is not possible to build anything new without destroying something. But we should not forget that whereas we are destroying something, our aim is to build something new.” It should thus be clear that Swarajism was not conceptualized as an alternative to mainstream Congress politics. Rather it was intended to enrich the Congress politics by adding a new dimension to it.

14.4 SWARAJISTS AT THE POLLS

Elections were held under the GOI Act in 1920, 1923 and 1926. The 1920 elections were unanimously boycotted by Congress as part of the official programme of boycott. Swaraj Party contested the elections in 1923 and 1926. The 1923 elections were held almost immediately after the formation of the Party and it

did not have enough time to prepare for them. The elections were scheduled to be held in November 1923 and it was not before October that Party was able to start its preparations for the elections. The election offices were opened in the provinces and districts. Volunteers were mobilised. The lists of candidates were prepared. Financial resources had to be mobilised. The literature, booklets and pamphlets for the election campaign were prepared. The manifesto of the party was released in October. It declared Swaraj as the ultimate aim of the Party. Making of their own Constitution by the Indians was projected as the major objective towards the fulfillment of the aim of Swaraj Party. It was made clear that a Constitution for India could only be made keeping in mind the specificity of Indian conditions. Therefore an alien government sitting in England was not competent to make a Constitution for India, suitable for Indian conditions. Swaraj Party demanded in its manifesto that the Indian people should have the right to frame their own Constitution. It was highlighted that the act of Constitution making will eventually take India to Swaraj.

The demand of making one's own Constitution was both novel and important. This indeed was a new idea introduced in the nationalist politics. The British had ruled India with help of certain Acts passed by the British parliament from time to time. The moderate nationalist leadership used to generally demand better laws or an improvement in the existing ones. But it did not question the 'right' of the British government to make laws for India. **By asserting their right to make their own Constitution, the Swarajists added a new dimension to nationalist politics.** The politics of council entry was not to be an end in itself, but only the first step. Eventually this was to culminate in full fledged constitutionalism, i.e., Constitution making by Indians themselves. In the years to come, particularly in the 1930s, the demand for a Constituent Assembly became a central demand of the national movement and Jawaharlal Nehru integrated it into the Congress programme. In this way, Swarajism went beyond the moderate politics and provided the connecting bridge between the constitutional politics practised by the moderates and Jawaharlal Nehru's demand for a Constituent Assembly. The manifesto also made clear the meaning of council entry. The Swarajists were instructed not to accept any office in the councils and the Assembly. The membership of the party was confined only to Congressmen. The members of the party were instructed to behave as Congressmen in the legislatures and uphold the dignity and prestige of Congress.

It is important to recognise that this was the first time the nationalist leaders were going to participate in the elections. They did not have any experience of electoral politics. For an effective management of the election activities leaders like C.R. Das (for Bengal, Central provinces and Madras presidency), Motilal Nehru (for United Provinces) and Vithalbhai Patel (for Bombay Presidency) took it upon themselves to organise the elections both in the provinces and at the centre. On the whole Swaraj Party spent about Rs. 25 thousand in UP and around 30 thousand in Bengal. On an average the amount of Rs. five hundred was considered necessary for one constituency. Even by the standards of those days this was not a very big amount.

In the 1923 elections, the party performed well but well below its own expectations. The following table gives us an idea of performance of Swaraj Party at the polls:

Assembly and Councils	Total Elected Seats	Seats won by Swaraj Party
Central Legislative Assembly	105	42
Madras Council	98	14
Bombay Council	86	23
Bengal Council	111	47
UP Council	101	31
Central Provinces Council	54	40
Punjab Council	71	12
Bihar and Orissa Council	73	12
Assam Council	39	13

The party acquired a majority in CP and emerged as the largest single party in the Central Assembly, Bombay and Bengal. In UP it registered an impressive presence but in other places the performance of the party was generally disappointing. On the whole the party won 234 seats (42 at the centre and 192 in the provinces). Given the lack of time for preparations this was an impressive performance. At many places the party had not been able to find a suitable candidate. In Bombay for instance the party was able to field only 24 candidates (at 86 constituencies) and won 23. In Bihar and Orissa it fielded only 13 candidates and won 12. Likewise, from UP the party fielded only 33 candidates and won 31.

It was thus from 1923 that the Swaraj Party began its politics in the legislatures. The years from 1923 to 1936 were the high point in Swarajist politics of council entry. It gave a concrete shape to the politics of opposition in the councils. The party also scored some crucial victories, both real and psychological, against the government. What did the party do in the Assembly and in the legislative councils?

14.5 SWARAJISTS IN THE ASSEMBLY AND IN THE COUNCILS

Motilal Nenru became the leader of opposition in the Central Legislative Assembly. At the very outset he tried to obtain support for the Swarajist agenda from among the other Indian members in the Assembly. The Assembly consisted of members nominated by the government, elected supporters of the government, Liberals and the independent members, not from any party. From among this lot Motilal Nehru tried to mobilise the Liberals and the independents. He did it by portraying swaraj not as the demand of his party but as a national demand of all Indian members. He declared at the floor of the Assembly: “We have different styles of functioning. But otherwise the differences among the Swarajists, Liberals and the independents are not very real.” Such a perspective enabled him to create a large united front in the Assembly against the government. He was able to successfully reach out to Liberal leaders like Tej Bahadur Sapru, and liberal communal leaders like Mohammad Ali Jinnah and Madan Mohan Malaviya.

At the time of the convening of the first session of the Assembly, Mahatma Gandhi was in jail. The first task of the Swaraj Party in the Assembly was to give a notice to the government for Gandhi's release. The proposal was almost certain to receive support from other Indian members. Therefore, sensing the mood of the Assembly, the government released Gandhi the day the proposal was to be tabled. This was the first victory of the Swaraj Party in the Assembly. In February 1924, a resolution was moved by a non-Swarajist member, demanding a Royal Commission for a revision of the GOI Act 1919 so as to secure for India the status of a Dominion within the British Empire. Motilal Nehru moved an amendment proposing that the new Constitution should be framed by a representative Round Table Conference and approved by the Indian Legislative Assembly. The amendment was opposed by the government benches but it got overwhelming support from the elected members. This was the first and perhaps the most spectacular victory of the Swaraj Party in the Assembly.

In 1926, Swaraj Party moved a proposal for the release of political prisoners. During the non-cooperation movement many political leaders had been arrested. Some had been imprisoned without any trial. Many revolutionaries had also been exiled from the country. The party therefore put forward the demand for the release of political prisoners and the repatriation of the exiled leaders. But this demand did not receive the support of other Indian members of the Assembly and was defeated. Throughout the period (1923-26) Swaraj Party opposed the government budget and other government proposals. However, this process of non-cooperation in the Assembly could not continue for very long after 1926. Therefore, the party as a whole decided to stage a 'walk out' of the Assembly.

Before the 'walk out' Motilal Nehru gave a historic speech on the floor of the Assembly. He said: "We know that in the present state of the country, rent as it is by communal discord and dissensions, civil disobedience, our only possible weapon is not available to us at present. But we know also that it is equally unavailing to us to remain in this Legislature and in the other Legislatures of the country any longer. We go out to-day not with the object of overthrowing this mighty Empire. We know we cannot do so even if we wished it. We go out in all humility with the confession of our failure to achieve our objective in this house on our lips." (K.M. Panikkar and A. Pershad (ed.), *The Voice of Freedom: Selected Speeches of Pandit Motilal Nehru*, Bombay, 1961, p. 290.)

The pattern of protest against the government continued also in the provincial councils. Given its majority status in CP, the protest was much more effective there. But the nature of Swarajist activities in all the provinces was very similar. Government proposals were opposed; no confidence motion against the government was placed on the floor; the government budget was criticized and opposed. And no office of any kind was accepted by the Swaraj Party members during the initial years.

As you are probably aware, the GOI Act of 1919 had introduced the scheme of Dyarchy. Under this scheme, the ministerial responsibilities were divided between reserved subjects (directly under the British) and the transferred subjects (brought under the control of the elected representatives). Land revenue administration, Police, judiciary, press, and irrigation were reserved subjects. Local self-government, medical administration, education and agriculture were brought under transferred subjects. When the Swaraj Party legislators were asked

(particularly in CP and Bengal where they had a sizable presence) to take over the transferred subjects, they refused. C.R. Das, the leader in the Bengal council, said: “All the members of the Swaraj Party are determined, not to run Dyarchy, but to end it.”

It can be said that the Swarajist activities constituted an important intervention in the nationalist politics of the times. But this type of politics had its own limitations. Motilal Nehru admitted in 1926 that the Swarajist politics had not been able to take the country forward towards Swaraj. Even within the Assembly the government was able to override the opposition of the Swaraj Party. The Viceroy could always use his special powers, granted by the Act of 1919, to have all the government proposals passed. The government proposals could thus become the ‘Act’ without needing the support of the majority of the house. Therefore the opposition by the Swaraj Party had no substantive value in the Assembly.

What were then the main accomplishments of the Swaraj Party?

14.6 MAJOR ACCOMPLISHMENTS OF THE SWARAJ PARTY

It is clear that the Swarajist leaders had not been successful in changing the functioning of the Assembly and the councils. The British control over the legislatures remained unaltered. No major breakthrough occurred there. Yet there were some crucial ways in which the Swarajists were able to contribute to the growth of the national movement.

First, they were able to bring the diverse and disparate nationalist elements close to each other and on a common platform. Motilal Nehru had started believing in the 1920s that the different political forces in the country had begun crystallizing into supporters of imperialism and those of nationalism. *This* had become the major dividing line. It was therefore both possible and desirable to bring nationalists of all shades and colours together. This enabled him to politically reach out to Mohammad Ali Jinnah on the one hand, and Madan Mohan Malaviya and Lajpat Rai, on the other. The Swarajists tried to create a broadest possible alliance of the Indian members in the Assembly and the councils. However towards the latter part of the Assembly, not only cracks developed in this broad nationalist alliance, even the unity within the ranks of the Swarajists became difficult.

Second, The Swarajists activities did popularise the demand for Swaraj. This was an important achievement. The Swarajists did not get coopted into ‘colonial constitutionalism’, and their connections with the outside nationalist politics remained strong as ever. They were also able to influence public opinion. Their activities on the floor of the Assembly got a good coverage in the press. By this time, a large number of English newspapers had acquired pan-India coverage. The Swadeshi activities were reported in both the English and the other newspapers in Indian languages.

The accomplishments of the Swaraj Party can be better understood by comparing the two Assembly sessions. Because of the Congress boycott of the 1920 elections, there was hardly any nationalist presence in the Assembly and the government

faced no opposition there. By contrast, during 1923-26, all the government Bills faced stiff opposition. Five times the government was compelled to withdraw the Bill. Most of the government proposals were passed only by invoking the special powers of the Viceroy.

14.7 SWARAJISM AFTER 1926: DECLINE, DISINTEGRATION, MERGER

By the time the elections of 1926 were held, the political climate of the country had changed quite a bit. This was bound to affect the destiny of the Swaraj Party. The subsequent decline and disintegration was partly a result of this change. After the withdrawal of the Non-cooperation movement, the country went through a series of communal riots at an unprecedented level. UP alone experienced around 91 instances of communal violence during 1923-27. It was during this period that the politics of communalism began to enter Indian politics in a big way. Under these circumstances, the kind of working alliances that Swaraj Party had built up with leaders like Jinnah and Malaviya, became vulnerable and eventually broke down. This weakened the position of the party in the Assembly and in the councils.

There was also an increasing disillusionment with the party and its policies. Those who expected the party to bring about a political breakthrough through legislative methods were disappointed to see that the party's opposition to any proposal had not been able to prevent it from becoming an Act. The politics of opposition in Assembly had also begun to lose its novelty.

Yet another failure of some consequence was the rise of dissension and factionalism within the party itself. C.R. Das died in 1925 (at the age of 55) and many party members developed doubts regarding the efficacy of obstructionism in the legislatures. Some members began to advocate the alternative politics of 'Responsive Cooperation' in the legislatures. M.R. Jayakar and N.C. Kelkar were some of the major exponents of this policy. As a part of this policy many Swarajist members accepted office in the Legislatures. Vithalbhai Patel accepted the office of the president of the Central Assembly. All this was against the official and declared policy of the Swaraj Party.

As was expected, the position of the Swaraj Party declined at the time of the 1926 elections, compared to 1923. But what rendered the politics of legislative obstruction redundant was a sudden change in the political climate of the country. This change was brought about by the arrival of the 'all white' Simon Commission to assess the impact of the Act of 1919 and to make fresh proposals for India's constitutional advance.

14.8 SIMON COMMISSION: RETURN OF NON-COOPERATION

The Act of 1919 had stipulated that its functioning would be assessed after ten years. In September 1924, Motilal Nehru had proposed in the Assembly that this assessment should be done earlier. This proposal was passed in spite of government opposition. As a result, the British government announced in 1927 the setting up of an Indian Statutory Commission. The Commission consisted of

members of British parliament and was headed by John Simon. The mandate given to the Commission was to “enquire into the system of government, the growth of education and the development of representative institutions in British India.”. The decision to appoint the Simon Commission was generally received in Indian political circles with resentment and disapproval. The immediate cause for resentment was the non-inclusion of any Indian in the Commission. All the major political parties decided to oppose and boycott the Commission. This in a way also united the various strands within Congress and the political differences between no-changers and pro-changers disappeared. Motilal Nehru was to later declare regarding the Simon Commission: “While the Commission was a farce, its Report was even a greater farce.” He also decided in 1927 that the legislatures will now have to be opposed from the outside rather than inside. On the floor of the Assembly Lajpat Rai proposed a boycott of the Commission and Motilal Nehru supported it. He declared on the floor of the Assembly: “British parliament, British people and British government have no right to impose a Constitution on India against our wish.” Thus with the arrival of Simon Commission, the mainstream Congress politics regained its unity that had temporarily got side-tracked since 1922.

It was decided that the mere boycott of Simon Commission was not enough and that Indians should also create an alternative to the Report of the Commission. This implied creation of a draft of an Indian constitution by the Indian leaders. Therefore after the successful boycott of the Simon Commission, an all-parties conference was convened in February 1928 under the leadership of M.A. Ansari, an important Congress leader. The conference constituted a sub-committee to draft a Constitution for India. Making a Constitution for the country was one of the demands of Swaraj Party. Therefore Motilal Nehru was made the president of the sub-committee. Prominent liberal leader Tej Bahadur Sapru was another important member of the sub-committee. With this decision ended the separate political existence of Swaraj Party. The political life of Swaraj Party spanned a period between 1923 and 1928. It started with council entry and culminated in exercise of a Constitution making for India. In July 1928 the sub-committee presented a Constitution to the country that came to be known as Nehru Report.

Nehru Report needs to be recognised as one of the major political documents of the Indian nationalist movement. Its importance lay in the fact that it served as a precursor to the Indian Constitution that was made in 1950. The Indian Constitution borrowed many clauses and provisions from the Nehru Report. It was the first constitutional document prepared by the Indians for themselves. It also effectively demolished the British imperialist claim that Indians were incapable of constructive constitutional politics. The Nehru Report was predictably rejected by the British. Unfortunately it could not achieve any consensus among the Indian parties. By this time, the differences between Muslim League and Hindu Mahasabha had become irreconcilable, and it was simply not possible to accommodate the demands of both within a single document. As a result the Nehru Report remained a mere paper document and not a powerful and vibrant constitutional alternative that it was expected to be. Its significance was more psychological than real. It however represented a high point in Swarajist politics. The Swarajist politics was inaugurated with the agenda of ‘council entry’. The council entry had distanced Swaraj Party from Congress party and even though their links were never broken, the Swaraj Party functioned as a kind of parallel to mainstream Congress politics. The politics of council entry logically

culminated in the politics of constitution-making and with this the distance between the two disappeared. The Swaraj Party therefore should be understood as an important political strand that emanated from within the Congress, ran parallel to it during 1923-28 and finally merged back into the parent body.

In a decade's time, a new Act was passed by the British in 1935. This Act granted provincial autonomy and this time Congress as a whole decided to contest elections in the provinces. Congress scored a comprehensive victory in these elections and, after some debate, formed governments in seven out of the 11 provinces. So in a way the Swarajist programme was adopted by Congress as a whole in 1937. This was the ultimate victory of the Swaraj Party.

14.9 GANDHIAN CONSTRUCTIVE PROGRAMME

As was mentioned earlier in the Unit, the withdrawal of the non-cooperation movement resulted in a diversification in nationalist activities. Council entry was one of the strands that emanated from this vacuum created because of the withdrawal. At the other extreme was violent revolutionary activity and many young people in UP, Punjab and Bengal took to underground violence. Yet another form the movement evolved was that of constructive programme. This was a crucial component of Gandhian strategy of struggle against imperialism. It revolved around the promotion of Khadi, spinning, village industries, national education and Hindu-Muslim unity, struggle against untouchability and social uplift of the Harijans, and boycott of foreign cloth and liquor. Above all constructive work meant going to the villages and focusing on village reconstruction. Under this impulse many Ashrams opened up in villages and took up the work of spinning and Khadi.

The main importance of this type of work for the nationalist struggle was that it provided continuity to the struggle and it helped to link up different phases of agitations. It prepared people for the next round of agitation and prevented demoralisation and disillusionment among the participants in the struggle. Gandhi was fully aware that a prolonged phase of struggle could not be easily sustained by the masses. Masses did not have inexhaustible reserves of political energy to keep up the struggle. They needed to take a break from the agitation and yet remain involved in the movement. The constructive work fulfilled this great need.

Yet another merit of constructive work was that it helped take the movement to illiterate masses, who constituted Gandhi's "steel frame" as it were. It was above all through Gandhi's constructive work that the national movement entered the villages. The rural component of the national movement was consolidated either by the peasant movements or by Gandhian constructive work. The peasant movements could not be sustained for long for obvious reasons. But the constructive programme could be taken up at any point and sustained for long durations. The constructive programme also helped enlarge the social base of the movement. A large number of people, who had no inclination for organised modern politics, and were also reluctant to go jail, could easily take up constructive work in the villages. So in a way the constructive programme enabled a large number of people to participate in the national movement, without necessarily paying a social cost for it.

The above description however is not meant to suggest that Gandhi's constructive programme had only an instrumental value, that it was only an instrument in the struggle against imperialism. It was an important activity in itself. Spinning provided an additional source of income for landless agricultural workers, most of whom came from lower castes. In order to regulate constructive work, Gandhi formed the All India Spinners' Association whose purpose was to create rural employment by insisting on the city people to use hand spun cloth only. The spinners association soon reached over five thousand villages and provided employment to over four lakh spinners and carders and over twenty thousand weavers. Within ten years of its formation it succeeded in disbursing over two crore rupees in those villages.

Quite apart from its economic viability, the village reconstruction had a great moral significance for Gandhi. For him the real India lived in its villages, not in the cities. Fully aware that Indian villages and villagers lived in pathetic conditions, Gandhi suggested: "If India lives in the villages, let then there be at least one ideal village so that it may serve as a model to the whole of the country." Such a model of an ideal village actually existed in Gandhi's mind. In an interesting debate with Jawaharlal Nehru in 1945 on the future of independent India, Gandhi wrote: "The village of my dreams is still in my mind. After all every man lives in the world of his dreams. My ideal village will contain intelligent human beings. They will not live in dirt and darkness as animals. Men and women will be free and able to hold their own against anyone in the world. There will be neither plague, nor cholera, nor small-pox; no one will be idle, no one will wallow in luxury. Everyone will have to contribute his quota of manual labour." (Letter to Jawaharlal Nehru, 5 October 1945). And after India's villages were fully developed along the lines suggested by Gandhi, there will be "no dearth in them of men with high degree of skill and artistic talent. There will be village poets, village artists, village architects, linguists and research workers. In short, there will be nothing in life worth having which will not be had in the villages."

In short then, the constructive programme was a multi-faceted phenomenon. It had a strategic, an economic and a moral dimension. It was an important component of Gandhi's strategy of struggle against imperialism in which phases of agitation alternated with phases of constructive programme and thus kept the movement going without any break. At the same time the work of Khadi also provided economic relief and sustenance to poor villagers. And finally it was also linked to Gandhi's vision of an ideal village life.

14.10 SUMMARY

This Unit tried to explain to you the political significance of Swaraj Party and its role in the national movement. The Swarajist experiment constituted a brief but important episode within nationalist politics. Its life-span occupied the period between two phases of agitational politics (1920-22 and 1930-34). The basic purpose of the Swarajist politics was to extend the national movement to the legislative arena. The idea was that the Swarajists should get into the councils and oppose the British rule from *within* the structures created by the British. The Swarajist leaders, Motilal Nehru and C.R. Das, realised the importance of legislative politics and, instead of boycotting it, brought it within the nationalist fold. Swaraj Party contested the elections twice, in 1923 and 1926, and performed the role of nationalist opposition in the councils and the Assembly.

A high point of Swarajist politics was to deny the British government any moral legitimacy to make laws for Indians, and to insist that only Indians could make a Constitution for themselves. As a corollary of this, all the major political parties got together under Congress leadership and prepared the draft of a Constitution for India. This came to be known as Nehru Report. Nehru Report can be justifiably seen as a precursor to the Constitution of independent India that was inaugurated in 1950.

With the making of the Nehru Report, the Swarajist activities came to an end. With the arrival of Simon Commission, the political climate suddenly changed in favour of agitational politics. With that the separate existence of Swaraj Party came to an end and the party merged into Congress. But it is important to remember that in the 1930s, the legislative politics became an important plank of Congress politics. In 1937 Congress contested elections to central and provincial assemblies and formed government in seven out of 11 provinces, under the GOI Act of 1935.

The Unit also focused on the essence of Gandhi's constructive programme. With the withdrawal of non-cooperation after mob violence at Chauri Chaura, the national movement got diverted into multiple channels. At one end was the politics of 'constitutional opposition' practiced by the Swarajists. At the other end were the violent revolutionary activities in Punjab, UP and Bengal. However a significant space in the nationalist spectrum was occupied by Gandhi's constructive programme. It consisted of promotion of Khadi, spinning, village industries, national education and Hindu-Muslim unity, struggle against untouchability and social uplift of the lower castes, and boycott of foreign cloth and liquor. With the constructive programme, the national movement made its big entry into India's villages. The significance of the constructive programme was three-fold. It was an important component of the strategy of the national movement, in which phases of agitational politics were alternated with those of constructive work. This gave the movement breathing space and allowed people to renew their energies. Apart from the strategic significance, the constructive programme had an economic dimension also. It provided an alternative source of employment to poor villagers who could substitute their incomes by taking to Khadi work. Under the leadership of All India Spinners Association (AISA), the Khadi programme reached nearly five thousand villages and improved the conditions of a large number of villagers. But for Gandhi, the significance of village reconstruction lay much deeper. Gandhi saw the programme as the key to the transformation of India's villages. For Gandhi the villages were the repository of a superior moral life and an effective answer to the distortions that had crept into human life as a result of excessive industrialisation. In other words village reconstruction was linked to Gandhi's vision of an ideal village life. An ideal village life was Gandhi's answer to a centralised, aggressive and coercive modernity. In this sense the significance of Gandhi's constructive programme went well beyond the anti-imperialist nationalist struggle.

14.11 EXERCISES

- 1) What was the background to the formation of Swaraj Party?
- 2) What was the essence of Swarajism as a political idea?
- 3) How did Swaraj Party contribute to the growth of the national movement?
- 4) What was the essence of Gandhi's constructive programme?

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